The Language of Character and the Nature of Events in the Historical Narratives of William Robertson

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Ph.D. Dissertation

The University of Edinburgh

1999

Acknowledgements

This thesis began life as an M.Sc. dissertation for the Department of History at the University of Edinburgh, funding for which was provided by the British Academy. The funding for the Ph.D. was very generously provided by the University of Edinburgh Premier Scholarship scheme, for which grateful thanks to all concerned. I wish to register my gratitude to the staff of the National Library of Scotland, and of the Special Collections Room in the Edinburgh University Main Library, who have all been of inestimable assistance to me. My greatest intellectual debt is to my supervisor, Dr. Nicholas Phillipson, whose unfailing enthusiasm has been an inspiration. I wish also to thank Owen Dudley Edwards for his advice and encouragement, and Ingrid Merikoski for her support and friendship. No Robertson scholar can fail to commend the Stakhanovite labours of Dr. Jeffrey Smitten, whose comprehensive 'Bibliography' on Robertson appeared just in time to give me access to a great number of items of Robertson criticism that I had hitherto overlooked. Finally, many of my conclusions have been influenced by David Womersley's short essay on Robertson, which first opened up the subject to me. I acknowledge my debt.

Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between theoretical and narrative history in the works of the eighteenth century historian William Robertson. It argues that the excessive concentration upon Robertson as an exponent of 4-stage theory has obscured the essential interconnection that exists between theory and narrative in his histories. Robertson was a predominantly narrative historian, whose central interest lay in depicting public events and in illuminating individual characters as political actors. However, Robertson was sensitive to the sceptical and 'philosophical' critiques of conventional political narrative as lacking meaning, interest or a secure means of validating itself. He attempted therefore to use the theoretical resources available to him to restore meaning to public narrative, and especially to provide new contexts for the study of character and motivation. The project of the 'history of the human mind' was applied by Robertson to the revelation of political motives and action, and in the introductions to his histories he showed that not only political motivation but the nature of events themselves were subject to progressive change and refinement as society and knowledge expanded. Thus, narratives were no longer either universally applicable, or autonomous: in order to understand the meaning of the narrative and the true nature of characters depicted in them, it was necessary to invoke theoretical history as a 'framing device'. In essence, Robertson transformed the conventional historiographical introduction into a study of the changing nature of events and character. This process can be seen clearly in the *History of Reign of Charles V*, Robertson's most complete marriage of theory and narrative. In the *View of the Progress of Society*, Robertson described the movement of Europe from one pattern of

action to another, and showed the emergence of a new type of character, characterised by a systematic control of his own motives and interests, and by an ability to perceive and manipulate those of others. This new character is the product of an enlargement of the views and interests of mankind, and of the expansion of objects upon which such traditional motives and passions as ambition could be fixed. The new type of action that emerges from this complex social process is presented in the dense, multi-layered, interactive narrative of the *History of Charles V*, and the character of Charles V is its representative and the instrument by which it becomes the foundation of a new system of European politics. It is Robertson's purpose to show that such a narrative is itself historically constituted, and that both it and the characters contained within can only exist in modern conditions. With the *History of America*, the use of theoretical history as a framework for the understanding of character and events is rendered both more important and complex, since the interaction of very different cultures requires a plurality of theoretical dissertations, not only in order to comprehend the character of Columbus and the history of enterprise that he embodies, but also to encompass the very different characters of each of the cultures encountered in the history. In this way, the *History of America* represents a partial retreat from narrative, as the savage peoples of America fail to meet the conditions for a full narrative of interaction, and their characters can only be represented within the static confines of the theoretical *tableau*. Nonetheless, in the *History of Charles V* Robertson had reasserted the value of narrative as the culmination of European history, as a central part of the history of the human mind, and the essential instrument for the most important task of the historian, the accurate penetration and display of character.

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A Note on the Sources

All references to Robertson's works are from the recent Thoemmes edition of *The Works of William Robertson* (ed. Richard B. Sher; 12 Volumes, London, 1996). I have decided, for ease of reference, to cite each individual work according to its own division into volumes. Thus, the volumes of *The History of the Reign of Charles V*, which occupy volumes 3 to 6 of the Works, are cited here as HCV, I, II, III, or IV, and the same is true for *the History of Scotland* and *The History of America*. The *Miscellaneous Works and Commentaries*, which makes up volume 12, is cited here as MWC.

List of Abbreviations

BE: The British Essayists (ed. Lionel Berguer; 45 Vols., London, 1823).

EUL: Edinburgh University Library

HA: The History of America (Vols. 7 to 9 of the Works)

HCV: The History of the Reign of Charles V (Vols. 3 to 6 of Works)

HDI: An Historical Disquisition Concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India (Vol. 10 of the Works)

HS: The History of Scotland (Vols. 1 and 2 of Works)

HDI: An Historical Disquisition Concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India (Vol. 10 of the Works)

HDF: The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (3 Vols.; ed. Daviod Womersley; Harmondsworth, 1994)

LRBL: Adam Smith,, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (ed. J.C. Bryce; Oxford University Press, 1983).

LJ: Adam Smith, Lectures on Jurisprudence (eds. R.L. Meek, D.D. Raphael, and P.G. Stein; Oxford University Press, 1978)

MWC: Jeffrey Smitten (ed.), Miscellaneous Works and Commentaries (Vol. 12 of Works)

NLS: National Library of Scotland

WREE: Stewart J. Brown, (ed.), William Robertson and the expansion of empire (Cambridge University Press, 1997)

Chapter One

Introductory: Theory, Narrative and Character

1. Narrative and Theory

William Robertson's flexibility as a historian has long been recognised. Richard Sher, in a plea for a more 'integrated approach' to the study of Robertson, has enumerated the historical *personae* that could be attributed to him: "Diplomatic historian, ecclesiastical historian, "conjectural" historian, cultural historian, anthropologist, sociologist, and polite stylist".[1] Indeed, there have traditionally been three distinct approaches to Robertson as a historian. Firstly, he has been seen as an exponent and populariser of the nascent social theory pioneered by such figures as Adam Smith and John Millar, the 4-stage theory of social and historical development.[2] Secondly, he has been accorded an intermediate and indeterminate place in the history of historical narrative, as a follower of Hume and a model for Gibbon, and the least known of the great historiographical triumvirate.[3] Thirdly, his historical writings have been placed firmly in their social context, as the product of a man who was a leading light in the Moderate revolution in the Church of Scotland, and the central institutional figure of the Scottish Enlightenment.[4] There have been more variegated responses to Robertson's individual texts, and a variety of readings of Robertson's

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[1] Richard B. Sher, Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh (Edinburgh University Press, 1985), pp.339-340.
[2] Gladys Bryson, Man and Society: The Scottish Inquiry of the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1968). David Spadafora, The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth Century Britain (Yale University Press, 1990), esp pp. 253-320.
[3] J.B. Black, The Art of History (London, 1926). Thomas Preston Peardon, The Transition in English Historical Writing 1760-1830 (New York, 1966), esp. pp. 23-29.
[4] For instance Jeffrey Smitten, 'The Shaping of Moderation: William Robertson and Arminianism', Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 22 (1992), pp. 281-300. Smitten, 'Introduction' to William Robertson, Miscellaneous Works and Commentaries, Volume XII of The Works of William Robertson (ed. Richard B. Sher; London, 1996), pp. ix-lv.

importance as a historian that have at times stressed his achievements as a founder of modern scholarship, as a proto-romantic, and as a seminal figure in the historicisation of the concept of manners.[5] Despite the ferment of activity in Robertson studies since Sher's original clarion call, however, nobody has yet attempted a comprehensive study of Robertson's work in its entirety.[6] The very diversity of the essays included in the only full-scale book as yet dedicated to the study of Robertson, *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire*, belies the attempt to find in the concept of empire a sufficiently flexible framing device for the analysis of Robertson's work.[7]

The most intractable difficulty lies in the apparent conflict between three discrete Robertsons, what Mark Duckworth has distinguished as the "Story-teller, Researcher and Theorist", corresponding to Arnaldo Momigliano's famous thesis concerning the division of eighteenth century historiography into the distinct areas of erudition, philosophy, and humanist narrative. Robertson, like Gibbon, straddled the indistinct boundary between these three regions of historical writing.[8] The wide range of Robertson's subject-matter imposed

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[5] Colin Kidd, Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish whig historians and the creation of an Anglo-British identity 1689-c.1830 (Cambridge University Press, 1993); Kidd, 'The ideological significance of Robertson's *History of Scotland*, WREE, pp. 122-144; R.A. Humphreys, William Robertson and his History of America (London, 1954); Hay, Denys, 'Muratori and the British Historians', Renaissance Essays (London, 1988), pp. 85-101. Womersley, David J., 'The Historical Writings of William Robertson', Journal of the History of Ideas, 47 (1986), pp. 497-506. Laszlo Kontler, 'William Robertson's History of Manners in German, 1770-95', Journal of the History of Ideas (1997).

[6] Although Jeffrey Smitten's impending intellectual biography of Robertson may well supply many of the deficiencies of the Robertson bibliography.

[7] See Stewart J. Brown's introduction for an elucidation of the connecting theme of the work, pp. 1-6.

[8] Mark Duckworth, 'Technique and Style in the Works of the Historian William Robertson: Story-Teller, Researcher and Theorist' (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Melbourne, 1983). Arnaldo Momigliano, 'Gibbon's Contribution to Historical Method', Studies in Historiography (London, 1966), pp. 40-55. Gudin de La Brenellerie saw Gibbon's great achievement in his ability to "réunir les qualités de l'érudit à celles du philosophe et de l'historien": quoted in Chantal Grell, Le Dix-huitième siècle et l'antiquité en France 1680-1789 (Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 331; Oxford, 1995), pp. 1038-1039.

on him a corresponding variety of style and technique, and a subtle combination of many different voices and approaches. The writing of narrative history was significantly complicated by the challenge posed to it by 'philosophical' or 'conjectural' history, which necessitated new notions of what constituted the materials of history, and a corresponding need for a new orientation of the historian towards those materials. A new principle of unity and coherence was required, which would bring increasingly diverse and wide-ranging subject-matter under control. Momigliano has seen Robertson's work as much less successful in his integration of the competing tasks of the historian, more rigid in the separation of his philosophical, narrative and scholarly machinery, than that of Gibbon.[9] The development of Robertson's career as a historian saw him adopt increasingly complex forms of structure, culminating in the *Historical Disquisition concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India* (1791), a peculiar *mélange* of dissertation, and 'general' philosophical narrative. However, Momigliano's perception was not that of Robertson's contemporaries and peers. They appreciated the extraordinary unity of his works, despite their ever increasing scope and ambition. Thus, Edmund Burke in the *Annual Register* of 1777 praised the remarkable unity which Robertson had imposed upon vast materials and distinct forms of historiography.[10] Even Robertson's severe critics, such as Horace Walpole, allowed him the virtue of luminous arrangement.[11] Indeed, it is necessary to point out that Robertson was the only member of the British historiographical triumvirate to produce three distinct and organisationally separate narrative histories: the *History of Scotland during the Reigns of Queen Mary and of King James VI* (1759); the *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles*

[9] Momigliano, Ibid., p. 47.
[10] Annual Register (1777), pp. 215-216.

V (1759); and *History of America* (1777).[12] Unlike Hume or Gibbon, whose histories, while contained under a single title, were ongoing projects which expanded over time in a way that altered their original shape beyond recognition, Robertson's histories were all carefully constructed unities, and he changed them little during his lifetime.[13] Indeed, as Dugald Stewart noticed, Robertson had a "scrupulous regard to the unity of historical style". Stewart, one of the most perceptive critics to write about Robertson, saw him as the one historian who had solved the problem of the relationship between 'philosophy' and narrative in a single historical work: "By few writers of the present age has this combination of philosophy with history been more often attempted than by Dr. Robertson; and by none have the inconveniences which it threatens been more successfully avoided".[14]

However, the precise interaction between narrative and theory in Robertson's works has yet to be appreciated fully. In part this is because Robertson's narratives continue to be regarded as too formulaic, conventional, and simply dull, to reward close study. The real value of

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[11] Walpole, letter to the Reverend William Mason, June 10th 1777: in Letters of Horace Walpole (ed. Paget Toynbee; Oxford University Press, 1950), X, pp. 60-61: "though the arrangement is good, I see no genius, no shrewdness, none of that penetration that shone in the *History of Scotland*".

[12] On the details of Robertson's publishing career see Dugald Stewart, 'An Account of the Life and Writings of William Robertson, D.D.', in Miscellaneous Works and Commentaries (hereafter MWC) pp. 103-242. For a general overview of Robertson's career, see Jeffrey Smitten, 'William Robertson's Life and Works', Works of William Robertson (ed. Richard B. Sher; London, 1996), I, pp. xvii-xxv; Nicholas Phillipson, 'William Robertson as Historian', Ibid., pp. xxxvii-lx; Stewart J. Brown, 'William Robertson (1721-93) and the Scottish Enlightenment', in Stewart J. Brown (ed.), William Robertson and the expansion of empire (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 7-35.

[13] The alterations that he made during his revision of his entire corpus of works in 1787 are largely minor corrections of phraseology, or footnotes in response to critics such as Clavigero. On Hume's *History of England*, see Forbes, Duncan, 'Introduction' to David Hume, History of Great Britain (Harmondsworth, 1970); Nicholas Phillipson, Hume (London, 1989); Leo Braudy, Narrative Form in History and Fiction (Princeton University Press, 1970). On the process of Gibbon's construction of his history, see David Womersley, The Transformation of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[14] Stewart, 'Account', MWC, pp. 175-176; pp. 168-9: "By few writers of the present age has this combination of philosophy with history been more often attempted than by Dr. Robertson; and by none have the inconveniences which it threatens been more successfully avoided".

Robertson is still seen to reside in the way in which he clarified and proselytised the 4-stage theory, and championed the extension of historical study into the history of manners and social structures. His pronouncements upon theoretical history, especially his characterisation of the 'history of the human mind' in Book IV of the *History of America*, have been used and reused as evidence of the aims and methods of 4-stage theory many times, and the felicitous clarity with which Robertson endowed the project has been a boon for historians of social thought.[15] Such pronouncements tend however to be yanked cruelly out of their narrative context. Readings of Robertson as a straightforward representative of theoretical history too often fail to find space for him as a writer of predominantly narrative histories. For this reason, Robertson's narratives have been neglected, except insofar as his digressions and *obiter dicta* furnish insights into the methods and assumptions of 4-stage theory. Indeed, there has been a tendency to see his narrative history, especially the extensive and detailed *Charles V*, as an instinctive withdrawal by a conservative thinker into a conventional and sterile historiographical medium: thus, Karen O' Brien dismisses Robertson's presentation of the character of Charles V as "one-dimensional", and sees the narrative largely as a disruptive and irrelevant exercise, a "thin psychological covering" over the true theoretical and sociological content of the work.[16] In this way, Robertson can be dismissed as a writer who was incapable of pursuing with sufficient rigour the theoretical positions that he occasionally assumed. To an extent, this interpretation of Robertson as a historian may be correct: faced with the weight of historiographical convention, Robertson

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[15] The latest example can be found in Christopher J. Berry, Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment (Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 92-95, in which Robertson's manifesto of his history of the human mind is central to Berry's definition of the nature of social history in the Scottish Enlightenment, "because of its clarity not its novelty", p. 93.

[16] Karen O' Brien, Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan history from Voltaire to Gibbon (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 141-143.

did retreat into patterns and forms with which he, and his readership, were familiar. He was tenacious of the 'character of historian', to a much greater extent than any of the other 4-stage theorists, and like Hume before him and Gibbon after he appreciated the flexibility and elasticity of the narrative form.[17] Yet Robertson's importance as a model of popular theoretical history requires us to pay attention to the precise applications which Robertson made of the new theoretical resources available to him. Robertson's work, uniquely, lies on the faultline between stadial theory and historical narrative. In both *Charles V* and *America* Robertson deliberately screwed his exercises in theoretical history into narrative frameworks, and made them serve narrative ends. Given the extent to which he was committed to an ideal of organisational unity that stressed the importance of arrangement as the principal task of the historian, his decision to embed his historical insights in narrative forms needs to be understood, in order to explore the relationship and interconnection between the theoretical and narrative components of his work.

Such a reading may help to explain the peculiar structure of such a work as the *View of the Progress of Society,* the famous introductory book to *Charles V* that, perhaps more than any other single work, enshrined Robertson's reputation as a theoretical historian. Despite the immediate identification of it as a work in the tradition of Montesquieu and Voltaire, it was theoretical history only in a limited sense. Despite its apparent similarity, in content and language, to *L'Esprit de Lois* or Voltaire's *Essai sur les moeurs*, in strictly formal terms it was *sui generis*: it was tailored to the requirements of the narrative of *Charles V*, and its

[17] Indeed, William Smyth, Professor of Modern History at Cambridge from 1808, comparing Robertson to the splendour of Gibbon and the sagacity of Hume, wrote that "Robertson is always an historian, with all the particualr merits belonging to that character": Lectures on Modern History (London, 1859), II, p. 64.

particular combination of elements can only be understood in those terms. Furthermore, as R.L. Meek has pointed out, it was only marginally a contribution to 4-stage theory.[18] It is perhaps the case that Robertson's originality lay not in his contribution to the formulation of such theories, but in his insight into how such theories could be applied to the conventional world of political action. It is necessary to look therefore at the ways in which such theoretical dissertations could be used to give the narrative of events, and the depiction of characters, a clarity and a meaning which they might not otherwise possess: and therefore serve to deepen and indeed to rescue narrative from the attacks of sceptics and the complaints of *philosophes* who impugned the utility of historical narrative as a form of knowledge.[19]

Thus, Robertson's use of theory can be seen as part of a strategy to reassert the value of narrative history, which had been placed under great critical pressure in the eighteenth century. Most philosophical historians, following the critiques of the *erudits* of the Dutch Critical Enlightenment, had subjected the traditional narrative of war and conflict to a withering criticism. Historical pyrrhonists, following the practices of Pierre Bayle, taught a suspicion of narrative accounts as inherently fictional and partial that led many scholars away from the creation of narrative accounts to the management and scrutiny of evidence. Philosophical historians and critics added to this sceptical critique a belief that historical narrative was too limited in the nature of events that it depicted, the subjects of war, conquest and political chicanery, too closely focused on the external actions of a few

[18] R.L. Meek, Social Science and the Ignoble Savage (Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 137-141.
[19] For instance, the Cartesian critique of historical narrative, which exerted a powerful influence, especially in France. See Jean le Rond d'Alembert's Discours préliminaire de l'encyclopédie (Paris,

individual actors, and therefore incapable of rising to the real if distant causes of events. Thus, conventional narrative was dismissed as at best irrelevant, at worst both meaningless and immoral. Robertson was sensitive to both critical standpoints. Although his teacher at the University of Edinburgh, Charles Mackie, introduced Robertson to the canon of classical and humanist history, Mackie also inculcated in his students that distrust of self-contained narrative accounts that characterised the followers of the Dutch Critical Enlightenment. As a historian of manners, moreover, Robertson was profoundly influenced by the arguments of the Voltaireans concerning the dubious tendencies of a narrative unmitigated by the reasoning intelligence of the historian, and Robertson on many occasions felt the need to intervene in the narrative to apologise for the nature of the events that he related. Given these strictures upon narrative, it is necessary to ask the basic question why Robertson felt it necessary to provide detailed and sustained narratives of the events of the reign of Charles V and the Spanish conquest of America. The answer lies in Robertson's peculiar sense of the uniqueness and importance of the actions and characters of the sixteenth century, a period in transition from one set of manners to another, and in which new patterns of political action were becoming visible. Robertson clearly felt that only a full narrative exposition of the events of that era could convey the historical message that he wished to tell. Yet he wished to impress upon the reader the sense that this was a new kind of narrative, one that related new types of actions and new forms of character. This he did through the mechanism of the theoretical introduction.

2. The Question of Character

1965), pp. 46-47; Judith N. Shklar, 'D'Alembert's Vision of History', Journal of the History of Ideas 42 (1981), pp. 643-664.

Robertson's combination of narrative and theory was a remarkable achievement that, ironically, the huge success and genuine innovation of his theoretical works obscured. Thus, Archibald Alison, writing half a century after Robertson's death, claimed that Robertson's *View of the Progress of Society in Europe* represented "the greatest step which the human mind had yet made in the philosophy of history". By this Alison meant that Robertson had shifted the ground of historical explanation away from an over-reliance on particular causes:

> Society was viewed not only in its details, but in its masses; the *general causes* which influence its progress, running into or mutually affecting each other, and yet all conspiring with more or less efficacy to bring about a general result, were exhibited in the most lucid and masterly manner...The vast agency of general causes upon the progress of mankind now became apparent: unseen powers, like the deities of Homer in the war of Troy, were seen to mingle at every step with the tide of sublunary affairs...

Before the rise of a 'philosophical' concept of history, Alison argued, these 'unseen powers' had not existed in historical narrative. Classical history, however powerfully written, was dependent upon a model of history that recognised only individual agency or chance as causes in history. Therefore, traditional historical narrative consisted of "little more than a series of biographies, imperfectly connected together by a few slight sketches of the empires on which the actions of their heroes were founded".[20] Alison's discussion of the difference between classical and philosophical modes of writing history concentrated on the difference

[20] Archibald Alison, 'Guizot', Blackwood's Magazine, 56 (1844), pp. 790-792.

of perspective adopted by the historian. The classical historian used history as a 'microscope', in order to penetrate to the minute interior workings of the mind and heart of the historical actors:

> Their great object was to bring the eye so close as to see the whole virtues or vices of the principal figures, which they exhibited in their moving panorama; and in so doing, they rendered it incapable of perceiving, at the same time, the movement of the whole social body of which they formed a part.

Thus, classical history failed to achieve the distance necessary to "obtain..a general view of the progress of things". Philosophical history, by contrast, operated as a 'telescope', which surveyed the vast interactions of external forces at the level of society.[21] Instead of a narrative confined to the inward scrutiny of individual motivation, philosophical history sought to move the subject-matter of history outward, towards the history of civil society, institutions, social and cultural forms.

Alison's scheme of historiographical development therefore saw the achievement of Enlightenment historians such as Robertson as the liberation of historical writing from the belief that within the breasts of individual characters lay the explanation for historical events and political and social change. By moving history into new and hitherto unexplored territory, and in adopting new methods and subjects from which to construct their histories, 'philosophical' historians developed a history with the analysis of society and not the

[21] See Chantal Grell, L'histoire entre érudition et philosophie: étude sur la connaissance historique à l'âge des Lumières (Paris, 1993), pp. 276-289 for a discussion of the difference between 'telescopic' and 'microscopic' history in the early nineteenth century.

individual as its object, a history which focused upon the function of institutions and other social artefacts as part of a complex system of relations.

Alison, himself a great Scottish historian, was however writing in the age of Macaulay, Michelet and Ranke, and despite his political differences with the apostle of the *Edinburgh Review*, they shared the common aim of restoring to history its essential narrative dimension, threatened as it was with division into two separate and extreme forms of inquiry, the dissertation and the novel.[22] His critique of Robertson's *View* took as its starting point the need to reassert narrative as the *sine qua non* of a true history, and in praising the achievement of the Enlightenment *philosophes* he added the caveat that they had neglected the narrative basis of history, and had as a consequence failed to appreciate the role of the individual in shaping history. Thus, despite their differences and apparent incompatibility, the twin operations of 'microscopic' and 'telescopic' history needed to be harmonised into one historical perspective. In Alison's opinion, that was precisely what Robertson had failed to do in the *View*: "Men and nations seem to be borne on the surface of a mighty stream, which they are equally incapable of arresting or directing". After all, history derived much of its importance, and most of its interest for the reader, from the narration of the "deeds of illustrious men". The historian needed to unite in one work a "two-fold character": "He is expected to write history and biography: skill in drawing individual character, the power of describing individual achievements, with a clear perspective of general causes, and the generalizing faculty of enlarged philosophy". Without this double focus, the historical work, however philosophic, would not fully be a history; indeed, Guizot, the 'embodiment' of

[22] Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Hallam', Essays and Lays of Ancient Rome (London, 1914), pp. 51-53.

philosophic history, was "not, properly speaking, an historian...He is a great discourser on history".[23]

This particular criticism of Robertson's *View* seems particularly puzzling, given that it was deliberately constructed by Robertson as an introduction to an extensive and detailed narrative. Alison, it seems, had eyes only for the theoretical historian, and rather curiously given the nature of his remarks, paid no attention to his narrative. Macaulay, however, in his famous remarks at the beginning of his essay on Clive, alluded to the other legacy of Robertsonian history: his dramatic and vivid accounts of the exploits of Columbus, Cortes, and Montezuma, which shaped the imaginations of generations of British schoolboys, including Keats.[24] Alison's neglect of Robertson's achievements as a narrative historian may bear out what another nineteenth century historian, William Smyth, Professor of Modern History at the University of Cambridge from 1808, observed concerning the place of Robertson in the nineteenth century: that he was a historian to whom everyone had been exposed at an early age at school, but whom few actually took the care to reread and understand, assuming mistakenly that they already knew his works intimately. If he was an inescapable part of literary culture, he was also a neglected one, and the use that was made of him was somewhat selective.[25]

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[23] Blackwood's Magazine, 56 (1844), pp. 790-792.
[24] Macaulay, 'Clive', Essays, p. 502. On Robertson, Keats and Macaulay see Owen Dudley Edwards, 'Robertsonian Romanticism and realism', in Stewart J. Brown, (ed.), William Robertson and the expansion of empire (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 92-121, especially pp. 92-95; Robert Gittings, Keats (London, 1968), pp. 201, 205. The impact of Robertson's *History of America* on Keats was to underline in his mind the message that "individual effort seemed doomed to failure".
[25] William Smyth, Lectures on Modern History (London, 1859), II, pp. 63-64.

Alison's assessment of the *View* raises in particular crucial questions concerning the nature and role of character in eighteenth-century historiography, and especially its connection with 'philosophical' history. The eighteenth century has always been seen as the epoch which emancipated itself from a character-centred explanation of historical change. It was theoretical history which obliterated the role of the individual in history, and substituted for it social processes and institutions. This was the essence of Thomas Carlyle's furious denunciation of the *philosophes* and their approach to historical problems. In addition to erasing the individual from history, eighteenth century philosophical history has also, in its quest for simplicity and system, been charged with imposing upon individual characters a greater unity and clarity than they in fact possessed.[26] Thus, as they reduced events to patterns, theoretical historians reduced characters to types. The philosophical critique of conventional historical characterisation, most strongly associated with Montesquieu and his followers, but pervasive throughout the eighteenth century, was reinforced by conventional truisms concerning the nature of the historian's access to and depiction of character. Indeed, Robertson's work illustrates the paradox of historical characterisation in the eighteenth century: that, on the one hand, the theoretical positions that historians were increasingly

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[26] David Womersley, The Transformation of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 161-168; pp. 230-239, traces this process breaking down as Gibbon's project continues, and the *Decline and Fall* embraces the exigencies of the particular, and unified characters collapse into equivocation and fragmentation. However, it is by no means as clear as Womersley assumes that there was a single 'philosophical' approach to characterisation, or that it was typified by the imposition of unity. Indeed, Womersley's claim that Chapter XLVIII, on the succession of Byzantine emperors, represents a shift by Gibbon to a new anti-philosophical narrative of temporal sequence, seems to be contradicted by the fact that the chapter consists principally of a succession of "characters", whose main characteristics Gibbon enumerates without any sense of complexity and contradiction, and who are encompassed so briefly that there is no appeal that can be made by the reader to an alternative view of their characters. It is only when Gibbon zeroes in on his characters, and represents their actions with greater detail, that the problem of character representation that Womersley identifies arises: Edward Gibbon, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire(ed. David Womersley; Harmondsworth, 1994) , III, pp. 23-83. Chapter XLVIII is subtitled "Succession and Characters of the Greek Emperors".

obliged to assume minimised the role of character as they asserted their doubt concerning the possibility of recovering it; while, on the other, the language with which they invested their histories revolved almost obsessively around the issue of character.[27] Despite the inadequacies detected in both rhetorical and philosophical conceptions of character, Robertson did not eschew the consideration of the role of the individual in the historical processes that he depicted: indeed, for him, it was central. Alison's contemporary, the American historian William Hickling Prescott, recognised the importance of narrative to Robertson as the vehicle of insights into character and motivation. As Prescott admonished himself, the modern historian needed to look to Robertson for a pattern of the historian's treatment of character: he must possess "A soul to characters & to events,- interpreting thr *sentiments, hopes, fears, intentions* &c from the conduct & situation of the actors &c à la Robertson, see CV- vol II p. 421". From Robertson's *Charles V* Prescott learnt the basic lesson of historical narrative, that "Interest is created out of character": "Above all, keep *character*, - & especially the pervading, predominant character of the hero in view."[28] In acknowledging Robertson's sensitivity to 'character' and 'events', Prescott perceived what Alison had overlooked, that the narrative of *Charles V* provided that close and precise depiction of individual character that Alison assumed was lacking in Robertson. Ironically,

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[27] This is a point that Leopold Damrosch has seized upon, again in the case of Gibbon: "It would be a mistake to see this kind of characterisation merely as neo-classical abstraction. On the contrary it reflects a characteristically eighteenth-century recognition that people are known only through the roles they play and that their roles alter over the course of time". Fictions of Reality in the Age of Hume and Johnson (University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 113.

[28] William Hickling Prescott, Literary Memoranda (ed. C. Harvey Gardiner; University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), I, p. 42; II, p. 70. Although Prescott was writing in a historiographic milieu that adopted a more openly heroic view of character, it is clear that he learnt much from Robertson, perhaps in his own estimation too much, since he exclaimed at one point in his memoirs "Beware Robertson!". On Prescott's use of character, see David Levin, History as Romantic Art (Stanford University Press, 1959), pp. 11-19, pp. 53-67.

therefore and in opposition to Alison's assertion, Prescott used Robertson as a narrative model for reasserting the importance of character as an element in historical composition.[29]

Other critics went further, and identified 'theoretical' history as a narrative strategy that involved a particular presentation of character. At first, Isaac D'Israeli attacked Robertson's theoretical history on the conventional grounds that it represented a retreat from the realm of fact that threatened to occlude the real world of events:

> A speculative turn of mind, delighting in generalising principles and aggregate views, is usually deficient in that closer knowledge, without which every step we take is on the fairy-ground of conjecture and theory, very apt to shift its insubstantial scenes.

> Robertson's notion of *adorning* history was the pleasing labour of genius, - it was to amplify into vastness, to colour into beauty, and to arrange the objects of his meditation with a secret artifice of disposition. Such an historian is a sculptor, who, though he display a correct semblance of nature, is not less solicitous to display the miracles of his art, and enlarges his figures to a colossal dimension. Such is theoretical history.

Thus far, D'Israeli's analysis of theoretical history, while hostile, is similar to that of Alison: it is a method of history that operates on a vast scale, and that as a result fails to perceive

[29] Yet Prescott went beyond Robertson in the assumption of a straightforwardly biographical structure to his works: his *History of the Conquest of Mexico* was structured entirely around the figure of Cortes, while Robertson's Cortes, no less heroic, is part of a much larger story, and a much larger process. See below, Chapter 6.

accurately the minutiae and particularity of events. D'Israeli however went on to conflate theoretical history with the history of character and motivation:

> ...the theoretical historian communicates his own character to his history; and if, like Robertson, he be profound and politic, he detects the secret motives of his actors, unravels the webs of cabinet councils, explains projects that were unknown, and details stratagems which never took place.

D'Israeli makes the theoretical historian, and Robertson in particular, sound very much like a Tacitean historian, and D'Israeli invokes the argument used against 'deep' political historians such as Tacitus or his modern counterparts, that in their subtle revelation of motives they were in fact creating an intangible and unverifiable history of the internal movements of the mind. This is significant: the method and posture of theoretical history was not confined to the general picture of the *View*, but was present also in Robertson's depiction of characters and motivation, and at every level of the work. For D'Israeli, the procedure of conjecture was not an exciting innovation, but the recrudescence of an age-old abuse of history, and in attacking it D'Israeli himself was reviving and reapplying a familiar critique. [30] Unlike Alison, D'Israeli saw theoretical history and the narrative as inseparable, if only in a negative sense: the love of system that pervaded Robertson's theoretical constructs seeped into the narrative itself, and Robertson constructed a system of motives from out of thin air. A similar point was made by another hostile critic, Juan Nuix, a ferocious opponent of what he called 'los pretendidos filosificos'. Robertson, Nuix claimed, was guilty in the *History of*

[30] Isaac D'Israeli, Miscellanies of Literature (London, 1840), pp. 29-33. D'Israeli nonetheless appreciated what he called the "beautiful philosophic history" of Hume and Robertson, and described them as "the noblest of our modern authors, and exhibit a perfect idea of the literary character", p. 30.

America of using the arts of 'divination' to penetrate beneath the texts of his Spanish sources, and synthesise a new and imaginary history:

> El Señor Robertson no quiere adherir a ningun Historiador del Peru, pretendiendo antes formar una neuva historia de aquel suceso...Ningun de sus pruebas convence la imposibilidad de lo que refieren las historias citadas. Todo cuanto acumula, son meras conjeturas, buscadas para desfigurar, y hacer dificil la historia antigua, y producir otra mas facil y natural.[31]

Nuix had his own agenda, but the point which he makes is a valid one. Robertson's much-vaunted impartiality often consisted of his moving beyond the evidence, and relied on his penetration of motives and character, and his deductions concerning them.[32] D'Israeli's insights, although hostile, are revealing: he appreciates the extent to which Robertson was a political historian of exceptional subtlety, a master of 'disposition'; he links Robertson, by his criticisms, to the Tacitean tradition of historiography, with its stress on the 'penetration' of the historian into an internal world of motives; and by posing the question of scepticism of motives he touches upon one of the most important debates in eighteenth century historiography. Most importantly, he attempts to explain the connections between the

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[31] Juan Nuix, Reflexiones Imparciales sobre la humanidad de los Españoles en las Indias, contra los pretendidos filosofos y politicos (trans. from Italian by Pedro Varela y Ulloa; Madrid, 1782), p. 41: "Robertson does not wish to adhere to any of the historians of Peru, pretending to form a new history in their place...His 'proofs' do not admit that they cannot possibly be deduced from the historians whom he cites. Altogether, they are mere conjectures, with the purpose of misrepresentation, and of creating difficulties in the established histories, so that he may produce another history more easy and natural".

[32] Robertson's justification for this method, which he outlined clearly and candidly in Note VII to Book VI of *The History of America* was the need to mediate between two opposed systems: that of the Spanish historians, whom Robertson distrusted, and of Garcilaso de la Vega, whom he despised. HA, III, pp. 370-373. On Robertson's impartiality, see Jeffrey Smitten, 'Impartiality in Robertson's *History of America*', Eighteenth-Century Studies 19 (1985), pp. 56-77.

theoretical method and the concomitant 'theoretical' narrative: it is particularly interesting that it is in the *arcana imperii* that this is to be found.

Robertson was fascinated by the mysteries of political action and motivation, and so continued to adhere to a narrative framework that allowed him to display that action in detail and with subtlety and penetration.[33] Narrative had always been conceived primarily as a means of character revelation, and in the eighteenth century much of the pleasure as well as instruction that readers derived from narrative was contained in the insights into character that narratives were able to afford. However, scepticism and philosophical history both worked against the narrative focus on character, and made the drawing of credible character portraits problematic. Scepticism challenged the claims that historians made about their access to the internal world of motivation and their ability to penetrate the mysteries of character, while philosophical history shifted the focus of historical inquiry away from the consideration of individual character towards the analysis of larger identities. The actions of a single character could not be made the basis of a scientific investigation of causes, since they were not only uncertain but whimsical and unpredictable in their operations. For this reason, they could not securely be invoked as the substantial cause of real historical

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[33] It is often forgotten that Robertson was himself a "political leader", within his own "sphere of exertion", and this was a point that Dugald Stewart emphasised particularly for a condescending English audience. Indeed, Stewart posited the notion that for Robertson the writing of history was a displacement of his frustration at limitations of the political stage which he inhabited. See Stewart, 'Account', MWC, p. 178. This was despite Robertson's own protestations to the contrary: see NLS MS 11009, ff. 58-9 and Sher, Ibid., p. 99. Robertson was therefore the target himself of the sort of character conflict that he deplored in his histories: see the characters of Robertson attributed to Robert Liston and James Boswell, London Magazine, 41 (1772), pp. 281-3. John Witherspoon depicted Robertson as a sinister Mandevillian figure in *The History of a Corporation of Servants*, explicitly linking the writing of history with the usurpation of power: "The method he fell upon, was telling wonderful stories of the heroic actions of that people's predecessors, a subject of which they were enthusiastically fond. He had acquired a very great knack of story-telling, & could describe things so to the life, both by word and

movements. Such a stance relegated characterisation to the status of a literary *divertissement*, a highly speculative exercise in divination, or a piece of special pleading. While character retained its central place in historical narrative as in historical polemic, it gained new meanings and wider references under the impact of such criticisms. Philosophical history, in seeking to detect changes in the structure of society, developed a method for drawing the *character* of larger, more predictable entities which could be referred to more general and certain causes. By adopting a close analogy between the *esprit* of a society, and the internal principles of an individual actor, historians made character the basis of the new historiography as well as the old. They were enabled to extend their techniques of character analysis into territory regarded as more certain and more causative than the individual, without dropping their claim to penetrative power and authority. Indeed the authority of the historian was enhanced, and the claims that he made held to rest on more solid ground.

The effect that this had upon the study of individual characters is unclear, and no doubt varied greatly. Many historians continued to use character as a resource for the inculcation of moral truths, and as part of a gallery of virtues and vices in action.[34] Historians sensitive to the history of manners, however, were made aware of the need to locate individual characters inside a larger pattern of characterisation. For a historian such as Robertson, who sought to connect the languages and methods of theory and narrative, such a flexible use of the term character presented opportunities for forging a connection between manners and individual characters. Robertson used the term 'character' as the hinge upon which his narrative turned

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gesture, that every body was delighted to hear him". The History of a Corporation of Servants (Glasgow, 1765), pp. 64-5.

upon a number of occasions, in a way that suggested that, for Robertson, the adaptation of individual characters to a new set of manners was itself an essential part of the drama of his history, and needed therefore to be dramatised. By espousing a narrative of public actions and public roles, Robertson's histories probed the relationship between actions and characters, to such an extent that it seems, for Robertson, that the study of character provided the link between social and individual changes.[35] Christian Marouty has argued that it was the concept of character that formed a bridge between older concepts of 'nature' that still informed perceptions of humanity, and the newer cultural appreciation of the formation of identity. Thus, the concept of character formed a bridge between the theoretical and narrative components of Robertson's works.[36] In this way, a fresh understanding of the way in which Robertson treated character may allow us to see how he attempted to bring into alignment theory and narrative, and how he sought at the same time to reaffirm the narrative of public events as the essential means of understanding the nature of historical change.

Robertson's interest in character, as with his adherence to narrative, was connected to his abiding interest in the sixteenth century. As Meinecke has noted, the effect of Robertson's major historical narratives was to build up, from a variety of angles, a 'kaleidoscopic' picture of the sixteenth century.[37] The essential unity of Robertson's *oeuvre* lies in the insistent and unrelenting fascination that Robertson felt for this unique and singular period in world history. In one sense, it was an alien period, its manners mixed and in transition, full of

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[34] See for instance John Pinkerton, The History of Scotland under the House of Stuart (London, 1797). For Pinkerton and many others who continued to see historical characterisation as primarily ethical, see David Allan, Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment (Edinburgh, 1993).
[35] Christian Marouty, 'From Early Anthropology to the Literature of the Savage: The naturalization of the Savage', Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture 14 (1985), pp. 289-298.

remarkable singularities that Robertson could only explain through lengthy digressions, and in some ways almost incomprehensible. On the other hand, what made the narrative of the sixteenth century interesting, was its proximity to and continuing influence upon the modern age. Indeed, the sixteenth century was the birth of the modern, the establishment of a pattern of history that persisted until the present day, and which showed no signs (in the 1760's) of being superseded. Central to his conception of the sixteenth century was his belief that it provided a profoundly new form of political action, that triggered the birth of a new form of historiography. It is likely indeed that Robertson's interest in the sixteenth century was sparked by the uncommon excellence of the historians who had treated it, combined with a lingering sense of the inadequacy of their accounts, taken as a whole. This was certainly the case in the sphere of Scottish history, where the field was dominated by the gigantic but dubious figure of George Buchanan. However, Buchanan was probably less important in engaging Robertson's interest in the period than the Italian historians Guicciardini, Sarpi and Davila, all of whom Robertson read assiduously and praised fulsomely.[38] The sixteenth century witnessed the birth of modern historiography, and this was no accident, for the events of the sixteenth century were profoundly different from those of the preceding centuries. The Tacitean historiography of the sixteenth century captured the shift in political action that occurred in the early sixteenth century, but such historians as Machiavelli and

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[36] See Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative Vol 1 (University of Chicago Press, 1984), esp. pp. 207-218, on character as a 'relay station' between narrative and theory in Braudel's history of the Mediterranean.
[37] Friedrich Meinecke, Historism (trans. J.E. Anderson; London, 1972), pp. 193-198.
[38] On Robertson's admiration of Guicciardini, see Nicholas Phillipson, 'William Robertson as Historian', Works, I, p. xlv-xlvi. On Sarpi, see HCV, IV, p. 76: "He has described its [the council of Trent's] deliberations with such perspicuity and depth of thought, with such various erudition and such force of reason, as have justly entitled his work to be placed among the most admired historical compositions". For his interest in Davila, see his letter to Lord Milton of 12th January 1759, in which he recounts how "upon the greatest disappointment I shall ever meet with in human life (at least such I thought it at the time) I read all of Davila's History. I frequently turned over several pages without

Guicciardini, while capable of perceiving the alteration in the nature of things, events, motivations, and interests, that they were caught up in, by definition lacked the perspective or the resources of the eighteenth century historian. Sarpi, as David Wootton has shown, created a bridge between renaissance and enlightenment historians, especially in the depiction of character: his portrait of Pope Adrian VI had placed him in a social and institutional context, which saw his interests as part of the historically conditioned interests of the Papacy.[39] Robertson, taking advantage of the insights of modern thinkers such as Montesquieu, was able to take the process a step further, and provide in his theoretical dissertations a natural history of political action and motivation, which would supply the key to the nature of the events depicted in the narrative, and place the characters in a clearer light. This was the purpose of Book I of the *History of Scotland*, and it reached its fulfilment in the *View of the Progress of Society*. Thus, Robertson used the *View* as a means of explaining the nature of the action contained within the narrative. It was a process begun in the silent and insensible revolutions of manners and social structures, but which was completed and perfected by the narrative relation of events which was its fruit. His theoretical works set up the conditions for action, and the components of character, that his histories enact. The difference between Robertson and Davila neatly encapsulates the difference between the historians of the pre-enlightenment and enlightenment periods. Davila's *History of the Civil Wars in France* pays little attention to the background in which political action takes place, assuming that its narrative of passions, resentments and interests is universal and both applicable to and explicable of all times and places. Its discussion of

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knowing what I had been reading, but at other times it seized my attention & I forgot every other thing". Saltoun Papers, NLS MS 16711, ff. 230-232.

the French monarchy is vestigial and its preliminary picture of the 'nature of things' confined to brief characterisations of the 'great families'. Robertson, on the other hand, using the conventional historiographical introduction, connected it with the history of society and of manners in order to explain how certain patterns of action and certain types of character become possible in particular circumstances. In doing so, he provided a contextualisation for the language of motivation and character used in the narrative, by giving qualified meanings and social contexts to the abstract concepts of ambition, resentment, interest, and even zeal.[40] Thus, to the institutional framework for judging characters, motives and interests provided by Sarpi, Robertson added a framework of mentality, that historicised the hitherto universal and static notions of political action. Thus, the narrative, the centre of the historical work, was provided with a range of connections and meanings hitherto inaccessible.

History remained principally a means of recovering and presenting character, but this now occurred on many different levels. The character of the individual was contextualised: his actions were referred to the state of his society, the nature of his culture, and the larger patterns of thought, feelings and behaviour in which he was implicated. For Robertson, such characterisations still needed to be interwoven with the narrative process of revealing character. What the dual process of characterisation could achieve, however, was a precise contextualisation of the motives by which the actions and the causes of actions of the individual were understood. This involved the recognition that motives themselves, the

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[39] David Wootton, Paolo Sarpi: Between Renaissance and Enlightenment (Cambridge University Press, 1983), esp. pp. 104-116. Wootton points to Robertson's use of the term 'maxims and manners' to describe the porous relationship between social forms and political actions and motives.

[40] Sir William Jones complained of Robertson that he used the same figures too often in his prose: letter to John Eardsley-Wilmot, April 1769, Letters of Sir William Jones (ed. Garland Cannon; Oxford University Press, 1970), I, pp. 26-27.

passions and interests which propelled men into action, received considerable modification from the circumstances in which mankind was placed, and the social and cultural pressures which were exerted upon individuals. At the same time, he reasserted the importance of the individual in shaping the historical process, by redescribing political action as the product of a social culture that could be altered and restructured from within through a complex process of interaction and emulation. This was the essence of Robertson's *View of the Progress of Society in Europe*, a remarkable vehicle for his natural history of political motivation and a necessary machine for the reading of the characters of the narrative.

Robertson's narratives, in their use of the language of character and motivation, operate as a continuation of his theoretical project of the 'history of the human mind'. With the birth of the new political world in the early sixteenth century, a new type of character emerged who was himself capable of reading and interpreting the motives of others, and of absorbing them into his structure of interests and motives. Robertson delights in the spectacle of history as the process by which actors confront each other and penetrate each other's sentiments and motivations. He is clearly fascinated by that instrumental knowledge and control of men possessed by men as diverse as Murray, Beatoun, Charles V, Maurice of Saxony, Columbus and Pizarro. For Robertson, historical narrative largely consists of the exposure and manipulation of characters under the gaze of those masters of men. In his narratives, the action often hinges upon character, the assumption of a role, or the unmasking of another. The successful historical actor is, like the historian himself, a supreme reader of characters; and, again in a sense like the historian, he is a manipulator and disposer of characters, working them into a unified framework of action. Robertson is concerned to paint the process by which an actor seeks to combine several characters or roles, and use them to

augment or diversify his actions and responses. He uses the social roles of his characters to indicate the expectations which should be derived of the actor's actions; and to indicate the standard of propriety which should be attached to them. The figure of 'character' can be multiplied endlessly, enabling an actor to possess as many social roles as they can manage and integrate. Although such characters have clear classical antecedents, the conditions in which they act are radically different, and so they are recognisably modern. This modernity can however be hidden by the narrative itself, with its conventional tricks and devices, and so needs to be asserted in a non-narrative form.

This thesis will examine the uses that Robertson made of theory in order to shed new light on the workings and operation of characters in history. Firstly, it will look at the meaning that the investigation of character held for the narrative form in humanist historiography, as its essential purpose, and the division between Livian historians who saw history as the celebration of the external acts of the heroic character, and Taciteans who envisaged history as the examination of the internal motives of the political character. Then, it will show how as the form of history diversified with the impact of scepticism, theoretical history, and the enlarged reading public for history, the meanings attached to character were multiplied also, threatening at the same time the extinction of the character from history, its replacement by larger notions of 'character', and the collapse of character into Plutarchan *petite histoire*. It will then consider each of Robertson's narrative histories in turn, showing how Robertson used his theoretical introduction as an examination of the nature of the events to be contained within the narrative, and as a device by which to interpret the characters of the actors within the narrative. It will be argued that in the *History of Scotland* Robertson failed to find that special form of interactive narrative that he discovered in the *History of Charles V*, and that

as a result the narrative fails to break out of the pattern of feudal history that he provides in Book I. There is no dominating character in History of Scotland, and no exemplification of that mastery of character that Robertson admires: all is mired in confusion, and the action of the characters is easily reduced to a narrow range of passionate responses. In the *History of Charles V*, by contrast, the *View of the Progress of Society in Europe* sets up the precise conditions in which a character can emerge who possesses all the supreme narrative qualities that Robertson wishes to represent: and Robertson is able to represent this as the emergence of a character from a historical process- a coming-into-being of a certain kind of historical character, and a certain type of political action, never before possible in the conditions of Europe. It is this new form of action that sets the pattern of all modern narratives of political action, and *Charles V* is therefore the *ur*-text of the modern era. Moreover, that pattern is dominated by the figure of character: it revolves around the detailed interaction of characters whose skill lies in interpreting accurately the characters of others. In the *History of America*, Robertson moves beyond this framework, to depict a phase of action that could not be fitted into the structure of the *History of Charles V*. Here characters are so divergent and *incommensurable*, to adopt Anthony Pagden's term, that they cannot fully interact, and so the depiction of them is less easily fitted into a narrative framework. Indeed, *America* reveals the problems associated with the description of character within narrative that philosophical historians exposed. Nonetheless, to contemporary critics it represented the most secure marriage of form and content.[41]

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[41] Anthony Pagden, European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism (Yale University Press, 1993). On the debate concerning the relationship between narrative and theory in modern historiography, see Canary, Robert H., and Kozicki, Henry, (eds.) The Writing of History: Literary Theory and Historical Understanding (University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), esp. Louis O. Mink, 'Narrative Form as Cognitive Instrument', pp. 129-149. The view that history can only legitimately be written as narrative has been stated forcefully recently by M.C. Lemon. The opposite

case, that history is "irreducibly theoretical", and that narrative is a device to disguise this fact, is a central claim of Alex Callinicos, Theories and Narratives: Reflections on the Philosophy of History (Cambridge, 1995), esp. pp. 46-94.

Chapter Two

Character, Narrative and Motivation

When Robertson wrote in the first number of the *Edinburgh Review* (1755) that the delineation of the "characters of men and manners" was the first of the "real objects of history" that distinguished mature narrative from a bare commentary containing "Naked facts alone, without any attempt to trace their causes, or to discover their consequences", he was asserting conventional wisdom: that historical narrative was principally a mechanism for the discovery and contemplation of character.[42] History was, according to William Craig, a form of character-writing on a large scale:

> ...besides those who have professedly confined themselves to the delineation of character, every historian who relates events, and who describe the disposition and qualities of the persons engaged in them, is to be considered as a writer of characters.[43]

Eighteenth century critics and scholars tended to see the progress of historical writing as measurable by the development of a greater subtlety and penetration in the delineation of human character. Narrative had developed out of more primitive forms of history, such as fables and annals, which had been preoccupied with the external and visible dimension of the history of events. Fables portrayed the physical qualities and gestures of historical characters,

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[42] Edinburgh Review 1 (1755), pp. 23-27: MWC, p. 60. In addition, the author had neglected even to include anecdotes, as well as fulfil the principal duty of impartiality. Such a distinction, between *perfect histories* and annals, registers, and commentaries, had been made by Francis Bacon, and Robertson is merely following Bacon's prescriptions for the writing of history outlined in *The Advancement of Learning*: Francis Bacon, Essays or Counsels Civil and Moral with Other Writings (London, 1902), pp. 293-300.

[43] The Mirror no.31 (Tuesday, May 11, 1779), The British Essayists Vol. 45 (ed. Lionel Berguer; London, 1823), pp. 154-158 [hereafter BE]. This essay is mentioned by Craig in a letter to Henry Mackenzie, which records John Millar's approval of it, and attribution of it to Adam Smith: Henry

and the basic passions which they felt or aroused. Annals adhered too closely to the surface appearance of events, and failed to enable the reader to enter into the real if hidden causes beneath the external actions. As a consequence, they failed to provide either a principle of unity in their variety and multiplicity, or a real explanation for them. Narrative provided both, by recognising that what appeared to be the reality of the phenomenal world was in fact chaotic, disordered, and disclosed no essential truths: rather, it concealed them beneath a mountain of naked and largely irrelevant facts that obscured both the meaning and order of history. Narrative, by freeing history from the tyranny of chronology, moved away from the attempt to mirror the reality of events, and instead moved inward into the investigation of the unseen causes of visible events, that is, the motives of the actors, the internal motions of their minds and hearts. Such concealed springs of action provided the historian with the means to make history meaningful, ordered and morally committed. Narrative was a complex system that displayed simultaneously two different orders of reality, the external actions that most took to be the object of history, and the secret world of motivation that only a privileged few were capable of perceiving and representing. It was the art of the historian to incorporate the occult, invisible and insensible forces that shaped history into the relation of events in such a way that they could be presented as real, visible and sensible, and therefore not open to question or dispute. The penetration of motives placed a great burden upon the historian: it required great powers of sagacity, discernment and arrangement that were clearly beyond the capacities of most men. It was the most difficult task that the historian faced, and it is unsurprising that few were capable of achieving it to the satisfaction of most critics.

Mackenzie, Literature and Literati: The Literary Correspondence and Notebooks of Henry Mackenzie (vol. 1; ed. Horst Drescher; Frankfurt am Main, 1989), p. 79.

Nonetheless it was indispensable, since the discovery of motivation was the defining quality of true history.

The eighteenth century perceived the evolution of historical writing as being towards an ever greater sophistication in the treatment of motives. This had of course classical antecedents: Dionysius of Halicarnassus had written of the Greek historian Theopompus that he "analyses the concealed causes of deeds, the motives of those responsible for them, the emotions in their hearts, something most people do not easily comprehend".[44] However, it was in the modern age that motives had been placed at the centre of historical narrative, and had been treated rigorously and accurately. The history of motives indeed had unsurprisingly taken root in Italy, the land of political deception and intricate manoeuvres. Nancy Struever has shown that it was the Italian humanist historians of the fifteenth century who comprehensively shifted the ground of history towards the scrutiny of the 'invisible action of the mind', parallel to the recital of the visible behaviour of the actors.[45] It was the later historians, Guicciardini and Sarpi, however, who most forcefully transmitted the history of motives to the eighteenth century. As Felix Gilbert argues, Guicciardini was a historian centrally concerned with the psychology of motives, who wove his study of motives into the texture of his narrative, allowing it to emerge naturally from the interplay of events with their psychological reflections in the mind of the actor. Thus, Gilbert says, the *Istoria d'Italia* moves on two levels: the level of physical action, and that of motivation, following their

[44] Quoted and discussed in Charles W. Fornara, The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome (University of California Press, 1983), p. 82.
[45] Nancy S. Struever, The Language of History in the Renaissance: Rhetorical and Historical Consciousness in Florentine Humanism (Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 75.

action and reaction upon each other.[46] Such an intricate and skilful arrangement of materials was accorded second place only to the remarkable insight into the nature of character and action that Guicciardini disclosed. By the early eighteenth century histories were judged primarily upon their ability to reveal this new layer of action. Jean Le Clerc distinguished the investigation of the "disposition of Men's Minds" as the 'soul' of history, with 'facts' simply as the body.[47] Lenglet DuFresnoy stated that, "étudier l'histoire, c'est étudier les motifs, les opinions & les passions des hommes, pour en pénétrer les ressors, les tours et les détours". By this method, history was an essentially metaphysical activity, promoting self-knowledge by studying in the actions of men "les reflis les plus cachée de leur coeur"[48]. René Rapin was even more explicit about this need to move into the interior, to penetrate the workings of the human heart, and of its importance to historical narrative:

> Ce n'est donc que par ce curieux détail des motifs qui font agir les hommes , que l'histoire devient elle-meme curieuse.. .Ce n'est que par la qu'un Historien se distingue, & se rend considerable, & rien ne plait davantage dans une narration, que l'explication de ce qu'il y a de secret, & d'important dans les intentions, & dans les desseins de ceux, dont elle raconte les actions... rien ne touche davantage la curiosité des hommes, que quand on leur découvre ce qui est le plus caché dans le coeur humain...Ce n'est qu'en remontant a la cause qu'on voit le genie de ceux, dont on

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[46] Felix Gilbert, Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in Sixteenth Century Florence (Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 292-294.
[47] Jean Le Clerc, Account of the Earl of Clarendon's History of the Civil Wars (trans. J. Ozell; London, 1710), p. 7.
[48] Nicolas Lenglet DuFresnoy, Méthode pour étudier l'Histoire (Brussels, 1714), pp. 1-4. On DuFresnoy and the *ars historica*, see Geraldine Sheridan, Nicolas Lenglet DuFresnoy (Voltaire Foundation, Oxford, 1984).

> parle, qu'on reconnoit l'esprit dans lequel ils agissent, de quoi ils sont capables, & qu'on trouve la verité, en approfondissant les intentions qu'ils ont.[49]

It was only by revealing that which was secret, hidden and internal, that history could make a claim to give a truthful representation, because truth was "envelopée de tous les déguisemens, dont est capable le coeur humain". As Rapin explained, the phenomenal world of events and action was merely the 'theatre of the world', and historical actors truly were merely 'actors': to present only that, would be to give a history devoid of meaning.[50]

This was not entirely a question of the utility of narrative, however. For Adam Smith, the history of motives was the most advanced stage in the progress of historiography, a product not only of the development of society but more specifically of the changing and increasingly elaborate taste of the readership for historical narrative. Thus, the early fables which had once been passed off as history earned nothing but the ridicule of a more polite reader. The early histories of a nation, Smith implied, have the same relation to a modern history as "wild and extravagant Romances" do to "Novells which unfold the tender emotions or more violent passions in the characters they bring before us". In an advanced and refined state of society, such as that of France under Louis XV or Rome under the early empire, the historian is compelled to find a subject-matter and method which would "please and interest most", and therefore represent "such actions and passions as, being affecting in themselves, or displaying the delicate feelings of the Human heart, were likely to be interesting". A primitive and unreflecting people were more likely to be interested in those things which

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[49] René Rapin, Instructions pour l'histoire , reprinted as Part II of Nicolas Lenglet DuFresnoy, Méthode pour étudier l'Histoire (Brussels, 1714), pp.139-140.
[50] Rapin, Ibid., p. 143.

happened "without", which make a greater outward impression and 'show'. A rich, refined and *indolent* people by contrast will be primarily engaged and affected by "Sentiment"; their 'taste' would naturally lead them to accounts of "the motions of the human mind, and those events that were accounted for by the different internall affections that influenced the persons concerned".[51]

Henry Steuart, in his analysis of Sallust, echoed Smith's scheme of historical development, although he attributed the breakthrough in the history of historiography not to Tacitus, but to Sallust:

> He studies history after a method new and philosophical...the history to which our author so vigorously directed his studies, was not the mere knowledge of dates and eras, but a science of a more profound and important species...By analyzing the complicated mass of our motives to action, he aspired to direct and regulate those motives, from the general principles that were deducible from the process. He first studied history by a deep insight into the human mind; and then was enabled to illumine and enlarge the mind, by the light of history...an attempt to penetrate the human heart, and to explore, in its recesses, the true springs, that actuate the conduct of men. By a study of character, he perceived that habits and propensities might be traced to their source; that secret motives, and busy passions, might often be seen at work, and the whole human mind, as it were laid open and anatomized, by the acute observer.

[51] Adam Smith, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (ed. J.C. Bryce; Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 111-112.

Steuart annexed to the language of historical motivation the 'anatomy' of neo-classical character-writings and the French *moralistes*, and linked this endeavour to an as yet unwritten history of the human mind. This new 'Philosophic' history had broken through the "trammels of the antient narrative", and created a new enlarged form of history both more scientific and more essentially truthful than "a pleasing narrative of civil events".[52]

The motions of the human mind, however, did not in themselves explain character. The provision of formal 'characters' arose from the attempt to place these motives into some sort of order. A narrative of motives alone would run the risk of fracturing and attenuating the individual actor, and of dispersing him into a plurality of discrete motives and actions. The historian collected together the incessant stream of motives, and by building them up into a 'character' placed them in a systematic relationship to each other. The duty of the historian to provide a 'character' emerged partly from the growing interest in motivation, but more specifically from the classical rhetorical requirement of the historian, his judicial and forensic functions. Cicero had enjoined upon the historian the need to provide, beyond a mere "statement of what was done or said... an exposition of all contributory causes, whether originating in accident, discretion, or foolhardiness; and, as for individual actors, besides an account of their exploits, it demands particulars of their lives and characters of such as are outstanding in renown and dignity". The eighteenth century critic Peter Whalley, echoing Cicero, insisted that as well as informing the reader of causes, "Motives, Actors and Consequences" the historian should "give us his own Sentiments of such Motives, and the particular Manner of each Event... And as to the Actors themselves, he should acquaint us,

[52] Henry Steuart, Works of Sallust (London, 1806), vol. I, p.274

not only with what they did, but inform us of the Nature and Character of the most eminent Personages".[53] The uses of the character for the narrative were manifold. It was the means of preventing the history of motives from dissolving itself into a mere succession of fleeting internal events. The character enabled the historian to preserve coherence and ensure a certain continuity throughout a long train of events and thus, as Leo Braudy has written, provided him with a means of ordering unruly events, and fixing upon them a meaning.[54] Pope in his *Epistle to Cobham* had expressed his fear that the method of constructing character, by 'inferring the motive from the deed', simply led to the dissolution of the individual into a series of distinct and momentary figures:

> Tho' strong the bent, yet quick the turns of mind:
> Or puzzling contraries confound the whole,
> Or Affectations quite reverse the soul...

As Patricia Meyer Spacks has shown, Pope sought to resolve the contrarieties and inconsistencies through a 'fiction of coherence', the device of the 'ruling passion'.[55] The problem was no less urgent for historians, whose narratives were often wide-ranging, and usually not centred upon a single person: the actors appeared and disappeared at the whim of events. In order to guide the readers' responses, and to maintain control over the meaning

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[53] Cicero, De Oratore (trans. E.W. Sutton and H. Rackman; Loeb Classical Library, 1948), Vol I; II, xv, 62-64, pp. 244-245; Peter Whalley, An Essay on the Manner of Writing History (London, 1746; Augustan Reprint Society, 80, Los Angeles, 1960), pp. 4-5.
[54] Leo Braudy, Narrative Form in History and Fiction (Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 40-51.
[55] The Poems of Alexander Pope (ed. John Butt, London and New York, 1963), pp. 553-554. Patricia Meyer Spacks, 'Fictions of Passion: The Case of Pope', Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 20 (1989), pp. 43-53.

and message of the history, historians needed their own 'fiction of coherence', the set-piece character.

Around this unifying force, entire histories could be structured. The formal 'characterisation' moreover provided an explicit location for the moral and political instruction that the historian wished to impart, a space cleared from the neutral arena of the narrative in which the historian could compare, correlate, synthesise and generalise the actions and characters that he had hitherto simply related. In much the same way as the neo-classical Theophrastan 'character' provided what Louis Van Delft has called "le lieu- le *locus*, au sens le plus litteral,- de l'être moral", character within the context of the narrative offered a withdrawal from the relentless bombardment of action into an order, a different language, a gallery or map of political and moral truths embodied in human form.[56] It was the place where the historian intruded himself most explicitly into the history, and where he was permitted to unloose his comments, reflections, judgements, gather them together, and systematise them. It aided the clarity of a narrative which might, perhaps, lose itself in the rapidity of its events. Furthermore, the character allowed the historian a forum for the display of his forensic and artistic capability, his artistic command of concision, and his penetrative insight into human nature. Characters could be treated, in a form of synecdoche, as a convenient index to the work as a whole: they were easily digestible and excerpted intervals in the narrative which could be cited in their entirety as a showcase for or demonstration of the literary qualities

[56] Louis Van Delft, Littérature et anthropologie: Nature humaine et caractère à l'âge classique (Paris, 1993), p. 7. Van Delft has provided the most detailed and fascinating study of 'the character' as a form used by successive writers in a vast array of genres in order to describe human nature. In addition to the connections with the notion of 'place' or cartography, character was also seen as part of an 'anatomy', a theatre, and a cosmography of human nature. For a narrower and more localised study of character,

and political stance of the entire history. They provided the general reader with a sudden access to the argument of the history, especially useful for those unwilling to pay attention to the balance or nuances of the narrative, or unable to extract clear conclusions from it. The *Annual Register* devoted an entire section to 'characters', frequently selecting extracts from histories as well as biographies, ethnographic accounts and contemporary political 'portraits' such as those of Chesterfield.[57] Characters tended to form also the centrepiece of selections of the 'beauties' of historical writers. Far from breaking up the interest of the reader, as some hostile critics claimed, the 'character' could be seen as providing the reader with a welcome resting-point from the incessant movement of the narrative. It gave the reader an engagement with the historian's argument which was denied, perhaps, by the ease and flow of the narrative, and provided him, as Lord Monboddo complained, only with an insight into the character of the historian himself.[58] Character was therefore not only a tool for the clarification and generalisation of the narrative, but one of the primary means by which the historian marketed and 'sold' his history to a public clearly fascinated by representations of historical actors. The editor of a volume of Robertson's 'characters' saw them as offering the reader a purchase on the mind of the historian:

> By collecting the principal delineations of character contained in Dr. Robertson's several histories, he [the editor] has presented the most interesting portions of his works to the reader; and he also hopes his most striking *Beauties*...Here the parts of a

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see J.W. Smeed, The Theophrastan 'Character': the history of a literary genre (Oxford University Press, 1985).

[57] For instance, see the *Annual Register* for 1776, which included in this section the picture by Ammianus Marcellinus 'of the condition and manners of the people of Rome when first pillaged by Barbarians'; the customs and manners of Athens; a sketch of the manners and customs of the Mexicans, and anecdotes concerning Newton and Hume.

> work most conspicuous for merit are collected: we view the author himself, & any influence which he can have upon the mind operates with full force.[59]

In the contemplation of character, the reader was confronting not only the individual represented, but the historian himself. The claim that narrative was an autonomous and self-evident reality whose aim was to depict actions as directly experienced by the reader, was therefore challenged by the 'character'.

Despite their affiliations with character-writings, however, the characters that history disclosed were significantly different from the static and enclosed portrayals of character found in Theophrastan and neo-classical portraiture. The fundamental distinction between them was made by Henry Gally, in his *Critical Essay on Character-Writings*: "Histories are pictures as well as Characters; but there will ever be as wide a Difference between 'em, as there is between a Picture at full length, and one in miniature".[60] While the Theophrastan character-writer simplified and reduced character within a small compass, William Craig emphasised that "the business of the historian is more difficult and more extensive": "he takes the complicated characters in real life; he must give a view of every distinguishing characteristic of the personage, the good and the bad, the fierce and the gentle, all the strange diversities which life presents".[61] Craig stressed the duty of the historian to portray the

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[58] James Burnet, (Lord Monboddo), Of the Origin and Progress of Language (1773-1789; Scolar Press, 1967), V, p. 13.

[59] Illustrious Biography, containing the lives and characters delineated by Dr. Robertson, in his Histories of Scotland, of Charles V, and of America (2 vols.; Edinburgh, 1808), Preface, pp. iii-vi.

[60] Henry Gally, A Critical Essay on Characteristic-Writings (1725; Augustan Reprint Society, 33, Los Angeles, 1952), pp. 29-34.

[61] The Mirror no.31 (Tuesday, May 11, 1779), The British Essayists Vol. 45 (ed. Lionel Berguer; London, 1823), pp. 154-158.

character of the historical actor in its totality, despite the risk of inconsistency that this might create. Since historians depicted character in narrative form, glimpsed momentarily in the ceaseless flow of motives and actions, they had to portray that character in its multiplicity. While the Theophrastan character was locked into a self-enclosed and excessively generalised framework, the 'character' in historical narrative was required to reflect upon and order the actions depicted in the narrative. It was therefore the interplay between narrative and characterisation that gave the delineation of character in a history its complexity, its *truth*, and its aesthetic satisfaction. Thus, it was felt by some critics that the nature of history as a mimetic and truthful account of actions could reveal character more effectively than the fictional genres. Peter Whalley asserted that "The characters, in these Kinds of Writing, are represented as they *ought* to be; whereas *History* exhibits them as they *really are* in Life".[62] This was a reversal of the old Aristotelian notion that history was constricted to reveal only the particular and therefore the more limited view of human nature, while poetry possessed a higher truth, that of the universal. In fact, fictional forms of characterisation slipped too easily into idealisation and neat unities to be either useful or true.

Historical character therefore was not only self-enclosed portraiture, but, as Frank Shuffleton has described it, "a language of unseen inner motivations" which contrasted with the 'language of the external world', but served also to illuminate it.[63] It was dispersed

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[62] Whalley, Ibid., p. 5.

[63] Frank Shuffleton, 'Endangered History: Character and Narrative in Early American Historical Writing', Eighteenth Century Theory and Interpretation 34, 3 (1993), pp. 221-242; p. 232: Thus, David Ramsay and Mercy Otis Warren used character in widely divergent ways. While Ramsay's history transformed itself through the language of character into the biography of the emergent American

throughout the narrative, and it was capable not only of relating together a variety of actions and motives to a single character, but also of displaying the mutual interconnections of a large variety of characters. As Gally implied when he likened history to a 'full length' painting, it had to pay attention to the harmonies and discordances of the relations between characters, and needed to find a unity of structure by which it could comprehend a plurality of characters. Narrative was above all about interaction. Again, Guicciardini had shown modern historians how they could encompass a wide range of characters, motives and interests within a single narrative. Mark Phillips has indicated how Guicciardini moved from the pomp of the set-piece characterisation, the gallery of great and illustrious men, in *the History of Florence*, towards a more fluid and interactive conception of character in the *Istoria d'Italia*. Therefore, the narrative structure of the *Istoria d'Italia* reflected this change in the notion of the role of character in history: it displayed a more plural and polyphonous 'cinematic' presentation of shifting and unstable events, and the minute investigation of causal chains in a tortuous particularity of detail.[64] As a result, characterisation in history acquired both a greater spatial and temporal scope than isolated portraits: in depicting the relations of the individual with other individuals and larger structures, and in following the individual through the twists and turns of events.

One of the unresolved tensions in historical narrative in the eighteenth century lay in the relationship between character and narrative. The construction of historical character was in part the rôle of the reader, since he took history to be his *magister vitae*, his means of

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character, Warren's more literal usage of individual portraits resulted in a heterogeneity of stories and assessments.

[64] Mark Phillips, Francesco Guicciardini: The Historian's Craft (Manchester University Press, 1977), pp. 157-168.

learning correct political and moral action, and of training his judgement in its contemplation of the actions and characters of others.[65] In this way, the narrative was seen as a pure arena of unmediated action which enabled the reader to experience the events of the narrative directly. However, character, as we have seen, threatened to overturn this notion of history as mimetic experience. As far back as Lucian, critics had argued that the claim of narrative to be a mirror to the events, recreating their form and texture as they had been experienced in the past, was illusory.[66] Instead, it was an intricately shaped artefact created by the historian's penetration, selection and arrangement. In order to give meaning to historical events, the historian had to go beyond and behind their mere description. The need for the historian to intervene himself into the text, to exercise a judicial or forensic function, was related to the sense that the mere relation of events, by themselves, was insufficient as a vehicle for historical instruction. The exploration of character placed a greater emphasis on the role of the historian as the interpreter of events for the reader, the intermediary between the actions and their meaning. For this reason, critics were profoundly suspicious of the historian's pronouncements upon character, and particularly of the formal portraits that historians produced of the major characters. As René Rapin warned, characters provided the most obvious 'inlet' for fictional elements into a historical narrative: "Pictures are a great Embellishment in History, when well-drawn; but Romances have spoiled that way; for we make too many, and those such as do not resemble". Thus, characters were a source of

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[65] See Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, Letters on the Study and Use of History (London, 1870), esp. pp. 35-36.

[66] Lucian, 'How to Write History', The Works of Lucian vol. VI (trans. K. Kilburn; Loeb Classical Library, 1959), especially p. 63. James Moor, Professor of Greek at Glasgow, asserted that the form which a history took was, like an epic poem, almost entirely the creation of the historian, An Essay on Historical Composition (Glasgow, 1759; Augustan Reprint Society, 187, Los Angeles, 1978), pp. 142-143: "it depends, entirely, on himself, to form, and fashion, those [materials] which are given him; &, to unite them, all, into one beautiful & regular whole".

generic instability.[67] Adam Smith saw formal 'characters' as inimical to the purpose of narrative, which was to allow characters to emerge naturally from the relation of motives and events. The acute suspicion that explicit characterisation necessarily involved a sacrifice of narrative integrity to the historian's love of system, partisan affiliations, or delight in beautiful language, was reflected time and again in contemporary reviews of eighteenth century histories. Thus, the *Monthly Review* wrote of Hume's assessment of James I in the first part of his *History of England*, that despite its judgement, command of expression and 'artful disposition of lights and shades' "in drawing the several limbs and features of the preceding portraiture, a greater regard hath been shewn to the spirit and elegance of the colouring, than to the true resemblance of the original". This was a typical strategy: the very literary qualities that raised Hume above all of his British predecessors in the art of historical writing, were made to cast a fundamental doubt over the orientation and judgements of his history. Yet the reviewer went on to say that the narrative itself disproved Hume's characterisation: history, as long as it retained its essentially narrative identity, could not entirely impose upon the reader: the truth would keep on breaking through from a full and comprehensive statement of the facts. Hume's 'panegyric' upon Charles I was nonetheless "even refuted and exposed by Mr Hume's own view of this prince's arbitrary administration".[68] The mismatch between character and narrative resulted in a history inconsistent with itself, but one however not capable of misleading the perceptive and alert reader. The tendency to view character as a piece of special pleading by the historian, or a rather neat attempt to impose a false unity upon events, placed character and narrative in

[67] René Rapin, The Modest Critick, or Remarks upon the most Eminent Historians Ancient and Modern (London, 1691), p. 86. On the generic ambivalence of history, see Fornara, Ibid., pp. 140-141, and Martine Watson Brownley, Clarendon and the Rhetoric of Historical Form (Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 12.

conflict with each other. However, character was accepted as an attempt at moral or political suasion, a piece of elegant rhetoric, and most critics agreed that this was permissible, within certain limits, and not inherently damaging to the truth-status of the history as a whole.[69] It enabled the historian to fulfil his role as a judge, as a painter of virtue, and as a condemner of vice. The fiction of the omnicompetence of the historian to judge of an actor's character was a source of intense disagreement, certainly, but also of great interest to the reader.

This consensus concerning the role of characterisation in historiography was not stable however. The excessive and abusive use of characters was challenged by the historical scepticism of the age, especially by Pierre Bayle and his followers. It was also resented and distrusted by those who saw pure narrative as the sole site for the judgement of actions, and the construction of character as entirely the reader's prerogative. Characterisation was further attacked by those who felt uncomfortable with the literary quality of the 'new' history of Voltaire or Hume, who believed that their superior resources of subtlety, descriptive power and rational clarity would make their portraits of characters powerful if elegant engines of deception. Some critics may also have felt that the destructive nature of 'characters', their tendency to fragment historical discussion into the assumption of starkly partisan positions, was in itself deeply damaging to the political culture of Britain. Gibbon, with the bitter dispute concerning Hume's History of the Stuarts very much in mind, had

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[68] Monthly Review 12 (1755), p. 227.

[69] James Beattie, An Essay on Poetry and Music As They Affect the Mind (Edinburgh, 1778), I, pp. 46-47: Beattie asserted the inferiority of history to poetry, especially in bringing forth the "secret springs of action", but nonetheless conceded a certain latitude for the historian: "it has been the language of critics in every age, that the historian ought to relate nothing as true which is false or dubious...But I doubt whether any writer of profane history has ever been so scrupulous".

expressed his own objections to the writing of modern British history entirely in terms of the problems presented by character.[70] Character had become the principal battleground of modern British history, and this made the claim to impartiality harder to sustain than ever before. The attempt by historians to act as a mediator between different views of character, and to construct a 'balanced' character from such conflicting accounts, resulted more often than not in 'monstrosities': characters who in their fundamentally schizoid nature could not and did not exist. Such ideologically motivated, if well-intentioned, exercises in redrawing character only served to reveal the hollow artificiality of the entire process.[71]

Nonetheless, as we have said, characters were far too useful as historiographical tools to be cast aside. Some historians were attracted to characters as a means indeed of altering and influencing opinions, in manufacturing consensus or altering the perspective in which a character was to be viewed. This was especially the case in narratives of events which were widely known and understood: such allowed little scope for a historian to reinterpret events except by casting a 'new light' on character. It was the one way in which a historian could assert a distinctive position. Seventeenth century historians from Bacon and Hayward to Clarendon and Gilbert Burnet had given character a centrality in British historical narrative that could not be lightly dismissed: it had been one of the principal means by which they had sought to raise the status of British historiography above the aridity of chroniclers and annalists. The example of Clarendon, although ambiguous as a model for historical narrative,

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[70] Edward Gibbon, Miscellaneous Works with Memoirs of his Life and Writings (London, 1837), p. 69: "...I should shrink with terror from the modern history of England, where every character is a problem, and every reader a friend or an enemy". Gibbon probably had in mind the reaction to the problematic characters of Charles I and Mary Stuart given by Hume and Robertson.

[71] As we shall see, Robertson's *History of Scotland* did not entirely escape such censures concerning the artificiality of his characters.

had made character an important feature of history, both structurally and thematically.[72] As Philip Hicks has correctly claimed, character was the one element of classical narrative that retained and even enhanced its importance as a medium for the communication of historical knowledge in the eighteenth century.[73] Even the history of manners, as we shall see, was not less interested in character because of its reconfiguration of the form and content of history: indeed, in many ways character became more central, and threatened to eclipse narrative as the vehicle for historical instruction. This was worrying for many critics, since as we have seen the acceptance of character as a legitimate device was dependent upon the corrective of a detailed narrative, which held the character in check, and provided a measurement against which the truth of the character could be assessed. If characters were to be detached from the narrative, or histories were to be structured entirely around a single character, then the history would fall directly under the control of the manipulative and all-powerful historian. Thus, a polarisation in attitudes towards characterisation was taking place in the eighteenth century: an extreme scepticism of the place of characterisation in history existed next to an increasing tendency to bypass narrative, and write history structured entirely around the concept of character. As a correspondent of the *Monthly Review* complained of Voltaire:

> It is certain M. Voltaire often colours too strongly. Fond of characters & anecdotes that may serve to strike the reader, he generally raises or depresses both, as best suits the point of representation he has in view; & if he does not find his facts & personages sufficiently remarkable, he generally makes them so...The remarks of

[72] David Nichol Smith, Characters from the Histories and Memoirs of the Seventeenth Century (Oxford University Press, 1918), p.xvi. On Clarendon's use of historical characterisation, and its narrative implications, see Martine Watson Brownley, Clarendon and the Rhetoric of Historical Form (Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 146-185 and Martine Watson Brownley, 'Clarendon, Gibbon, and the Art of Historical Portraiture', English Language Notes 24 (1986), pp. 49-58.

> Tacitus seem to rise from the narration; those of Voltaire often proceed from the man.[74]

At the same time, the language of character was intruding more and more into the fabric of the narrative itself. That is to say, that in comparing seventeenth and eighteenth century historical narratives, it is possible to detect a shift towards a more insistent and regular use of the descriptors normally reserved for the specialised place of the 'character', such as ambition, resentment, zeal, or glory, at every point in the narrative. Earlier narratives tended to focus largely upon the physical actions of the history, leaving the assessment of character to occasional asides, or to the formal characterisation. In the prose style of mid- and late-eighteenth century historical narrative, however, we see a movement towards a greater use of abstractions in the description of actions themselves. The narratives of Robertson and Gibbon, for instance, are less content simply to describe an action in physical terms: an actor no longer merely acts, he is transformed by a passion, a principle of action, a motivation. Therefore, the process by which the historian assessed characters and their motives was no longer confined to the set-piece character, but was embedded in a highly abstract use of language that ensured the precise and ordered characterisation of every event and actor at every point in the narrative. Thus, the historian demonstrated a greater interest in and commitment to the uncovering of the motions of the mind. While a deep interest in motivation had been demonstrated, as we have seen, by Guicciardini, as well as by many subsequent historians such as Davila and Sarpi, their narratives appear in comparison with those of the later eighteenth century relatively uncluttered by the complex abstractions of the

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[73] Philip Hicks, Neoclassical History and English Culture (London, 1996), p. 200.
[74] Monthly Review, 17 (1757), p. 156.

language of motivation: passions are invoked, certainly, but not with the mechanical regularity of the Enlightenment historian. To a great extent, the histories of Robertson as well as those of his contemporaries, allowed the reader far less room for the exercise of independent judgement. Through the constant use of qualifying abstractions, all of which purported to drag the internal mental responses of the actor into full view, the interpretations placed on the events were predetermined by the historian. The insistent use of the passions in the narrative, in particular, gave eighteenth century narratives a greater sense of distance from the action they recounted, as Alan T. Mackenzie has argued in the case of Gibbon.[75] Yet while the historian distanced both himself and the reader from the spectacle of history as a re-enactment and as a living physical experience, at the same time his histories gained a power of explication that was very much appreciated by contemporaries. The abstract and formal nature of Robertson's prose gave it a dignity, purity and vigorous energy that few contemporary critics failed to praise, and which Dugald Stewart saw as the basis of Robertson's success in England.[76] It is this abstract nature, so appealing to the eighteenth century audience, that probably explains the rapid decline in Robertson's reputation from the mid-nineteenth century: his prose, to a modern readership, appears hollow and lifeless, excessively conventionalised and general, and insufficiently individualised.[77] Yet it needs to

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[75] Alan T. Mackenzie, Certain, Lively Episodes: the Articulation of Passion in Eighteenth Century Prose (Athens, Georgia, 1990), pp. 194-223. See also Leopold Damrosch on Gibbon's minimisation of phenomenological experience: Fictions of Reality in the Age of Hume and Johnson (University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 111-114.

[76] Dugald Stewart, 'Account', MWC, p. 175: "In delineating the characters of princes, statesmen and warriors, or in recording events that have happened on the great theatre of public affairs, a certain elevation of language is naturally inspired by the magnitude of the subject". On Robertson's prose style, see Thomas R. Brooks, Transformations of Word and Man: The Prose Style of William Robertson (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Indiana University, 1967). Brooks has shown how Robertson developed a style in which the general and the particular were combined: pp. 86-87.

[77] To a historian such as James McKelvey, Robertson is simply "pompous" and overblown: ., 'William Robertson and Lord Bute', Studies in Scottish Literature 6 (1968-9), pp.238-247. To the nineteenth

be recognised that there is also a dynamic quality to Robertson's style, associated perhaps with his incessant repetition of the key motives of the narrative, ambition, resentment, and zeal, which all recur with a speed and momentum that hurries the reader onward. Robertson's interest in these themes never flags, and each of his histories turns upon a certain dominant passion or principle: resentment in the *History of Scotland*, ambition in the *History of the Reign of Charles V*, and enterprise in the *History of America* are used not only as the marks of character, but as the omnipresent principles of the age, penetrating every actor and action. At the same time, the variety of shades of meaning that these principles accrued throughout the narrative testified to the richness of applications which could be made of them. Indeed, at times in Robertson's narrative, these actuating principles take possession of the actors, and even seem to act through them, and to be using them as instruments for their fuller expression. Such motives become in a sense not the property or quality of a single person or set of people, but something more central to the meaning of the history itself.

In this way, Robertson represents what Smith saw as the principal feature of modern historiography, the investigation of the motions of the human mind. Robertson was not alone in this, but he used the resources available to him in the language of motivation with particular skill. Similarly, Robertson's use of the concept of character was in many ways entirely conventional, but was given a new twist by the connections and associations that Robertson's enlarged conception of political history created. In particular, Robertson used the traditional devices of the renaissance, especially the notion of man as an essentially dramatic creature, a creature whose character needed to be created and shaped by a process

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century he was perhaps too timid and circumspect in his judgements and descriptions: Prescott felt that he exhibited all the "primness of a country parson": Prescott, Literary Memoranda, II, p. 162.

of projection and posture, in order to reflect upon the changing nature of political action. As Lloyd Davis demonstrates, the process of the creation and projection of the character of princes was central to the manufacture of legitimate forms of power. Character was at core not only posture, but imposture, and dissimulation and disguise were essential to its functioning.[78] . What gave Robertson's depiction of these processes their peculiar power was his determination not only to use these devices for theatrical effect, but to place them in histories that had the development of these forms of action as their central object. In Robertson's reading of the sixteenth century, the new conditions of action that were created during this period involved an ever more complex array of interests and inter-relationships, and this meant a corresponding diversity of roles and characters available and indeed necessary to the political actor. The actors in Robertson's drama were after a long period of isolation and dormancy only just becoming aware of their relations with each other, and how these relationships could be used to pursue their own aims and interests. They grasped with increasing clarity that character was a potent weapon in their political armoury, and one which they could exploit with determination and unscrupulousness. Thus, Robertson invested his protagonists with a great deal of self-consciousness concerning character. It was the task of the historian to show how they deliberately manipulated the meanings and associations of character, as well as how they themselves were caught within and shaped by the set of expectations and standards of propriety that defined social roles. Robertson, in using the conventions inherited from renaissance historiography, was able to place them in a new light by treating the age of Charles V as an age which was in the process of forming the rules and roles by which character was to be measured and analysed. In so doing, he gave

[78] Lloyd Davis, Guise and Disguise: Rhetoric and Characterization in the English Renaissance (University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 3-21.

those hackneyed conventions new life, and a new dimension of meaning. The essential point however is that for Robertson character inhabited the entire space of the narrative to a greater extent than had hitherto been possible.

2. Two Models of Character and Narrative

When eighteenth century historians sought to justify their use of certain modes of characterisation, or indeed of any new historical form, they tended still to look back to ancient models, despite the intervention of the 'modernists' in the 'Battle of the Books'.[79] This was perhaps because ancient models, however imperfect, could still be seen, however obliquely, as the inspiration for essentially modern practices. Critics and historians alike tended to select a particular feature of any given historian and give it a spurious or disproportionate dominance. The three broad attitudes towards character, with these reservations in mind, can be related to three historical models: Livy, Tacitus and Plutarch.[80] All of these historians were frequently subject to serious criticisms, none of them, were perfect models, but nonetheless they appeared to represent distinct approaches to the problem of historical character. Certainly they were the most often cited when it came to character, except perhaps for Sallust, who was frequently compared to Tacitus in his apprehension of character.[81] The Livian model stood for the heroic- poetic conception of character, the celebration of an illustrious line of 'patriots and heroes', in the words of

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[79] On the 'Battle of the Books', see Joseph Levine, Humanism and History: Origins of Modern British Historiography (Cornell University Press, 1987).
[80] The Plutarchan model will be considered below, Chapter 3.
[81] Although Sallust was usually seen as a more straightforward representative of classical republican virtues than the ambiguous Tacitus. See Henry Steuart, 'Prefatory Essays' to Works of Sallust (London, 1806).

Horace Walpole.[82] Conversely, Tacitus was seen to represent a more 'philosophical' approach to character, more penetrative, and one less avowedly concerned with glory or patriotism. In the old historical typology, Tacitus' history perfectly painted the decadent stage of Roman history, as Livy did its pristine purity.

A. The Livian Model: Painting the Passions

The principal function of character in conventional historical narrative was to 'paint' the true beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice and to offer patterns of political and moral conduct on which the reader could form his own behaviour. It was in Livy that many moralists and classical republicans such as the Abbé de Mably, Thomas Hunter and Lord Monboddo saw the ideal representation of such a notion of character, in which the display of heroic virtue and glory was the principal aim of history, and the rhetorical painting of the passions was at the epicentre. Livy's ornate artistry and dignified style, as well as the epic subject matter of his narrative, represented in their fullest extent the eloquence, nobility, patriotism and virtue of rhetorical history. As René Rapin claimed, it was Livy alone who conformed to the Cicero's prescriptions for historical style.[83] Edward Manwaring praised Livy's "Majesty of Stile, Perspicuity of Narrations, lively Descriptions, rhetorical Harangues, excellent sentiments & just characters" as "superior to all other historians".[84] Thomas Hunter, in his *Observations on Tacitus*, held up Livy as the portrayer of nature against the strained and monstrous distortions of Tacitus: he offered "a draught in full life, in historic Characters, &

[82] Horace Walpole, Memoirs and Portraits (ed. Matthew Hodgart; London, 1963), p. 57.
[83] René Rapin, The Modest Critick, p. 41.
[84] Edward Manwaring, An Historical and Critical Account of the Most Eminent Classic Authors in Poetry and History (London, 1737), pp. 255-269.

real manners".[85] Livy's mastery of the techniques of rhetoric, especially of 'colouring' enabled him most of all the classical historians to appeal to the imagination of his readers, and to inculcate in them the appropriate lessons and responses by seizing their passions and manipulating them. As Gibbon claimed, Livy, as a master of the 'language of passion', "conducts you step by step in the track of his heroes, and fills you alternately with horror, admiration, and pity".[86] Thus, Livy's use of vivid, dramatic and passionate set-pieces, especially his deployment of fictional speeches, were intended to have the maximum imaginative, emotive and moral effect upon the reader.[87] Livy's techniques reminded critics of the association between history and epic: perhaps more than any other ancient historian, Livy illustrated the truth of Quintilian's dictum, *Historia est proxima poetis.* Moreover, they were intended to serve the purpose of the exemplification of character. As Lord Monboddo claimed, "by reading the actions and studying the characters of those great and good men, I become a better man myself, and feel a disposition to imitate them as much as my inferior abilities and lower rank in life will permit."[88]

It was the limits of this exercise in the imitation of character that were apparent to most critics in the eighteenth century, however. Livy's epic and poetic qualities in particular increasingly vitiated against the adoption of his history as a viable model for modern historical writing, and especially for historical characterisation. This was for two principal

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[85] Thomas Hunter, Observations on Tacitus in which his Character as a Writer and an Historian is Impartially Considered, and compared with that of Livy (London, 1752), p. 259.
[86] Edward Gibbon, 'Essay on the Study of Literature', Miscellaneous Works, p. 657.
[87] On the classical speech, see Richard A. Lanham, 'Theory of the ΛΟΓΟΙ: The Speeches in Classical and Renaissance Narrative' in To Tell a Story: Narrative Theory and Practice (University of California, 1973), pp. 77-98.
[88] James Burnet (Lord Monboddo), Of the Origin and Progress of Language (1773-1789; Scolar Press, 1967), V, p. 19.

reasons: the nature of Livy's subject matter, and the overwrought style and falsifying tendencies of his narrative. Both indeed were connected. Jean Le Clerc, the Dutch scholar and historical critic, asserted that Livy's exclusive concentration on the relation of warfare fatally limited his history in its usefulness and even in its essential truth. Livy's failure to include in his work an account of the laws, customs, and usages of Roman society made his work less useful as a source for modern historians than that of the meanest compiler. Moreover, it was Livy's concern to develop a beautiful style that had dictated his choice of subject as a demonstration of his rhetorical mastery, and this for Le Clerc had disturbing implications. Livy's patterns of perfect virtue were reduced to exhibitions of fine writing. Thus, Livy's history, while universally admired as literature, was no longer admissible as a pattern for historical writing: "En effet, c'est une histoire plus digne d'un Poëte, que d'un Historien".[89] Le Clerc's dismissal of Livy was echoed throughout the eighteenth century. As Adam Ferguson wrote in his essay on historical style, Livy could not be followed as a model for a historian. His history was a 'panegyric' rather than a true history of the Romans. Livy and his supporters were too willing, in their use of the rhetoric of portraiture, to "sacrifice knowledge to virtue". The aim of history, Ferguson reminded such writers, was not the propagation of virtue, nor exclusively to act as a tribunal of applause and condemnation, but rather to strive for a "fair knowledge of the passed". In any case, Livy's beauties were overrated: his elaborate figures and metaphors merely served to cloy and fatigue the reader.[90]

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[89] Jean Le Clerc, Bibliotheque Choisie, pour servir de suite à la Bibliotheque Universelle Volume 19 (Amsterdam, 1710), pp. 192-193. Nonetheless, even Le Clerc saw fit to praise Livy's work for its examples, maxims and ethical judgements.

[90] Adam Ferguson, 'Of History and its Appropriate Style', Edinburgh University Library MS. Dc. 1. 42: No. 3, ff. 13-16.

Livy, therefore, under the weight of historical scepticism and a consequent distrust of the dramatic and poetic devices which he employed, suffered a diminution of his reputation in the eighteenth century. Nor was Livy alone in this: all classical historians were subjected to a greater scrutiny as a result of the belief, stemming from the dispute of the Ancients and Moderns, that the form, style and subject matter of modern history were of necessity radically discontinuous with the older classical forms. Yet in the general revaluation of the nature of history, Livy's model was seen to be less adaptable for modern historians than those offered by Tacitus and Plutarch, both of whom were perceived to provide tools and points of departure for the new and diverse projects of 'philosophical' history. This was principally because Tacitus and Plutarch were both in their vastly different ways seen to offer a greater access to the internal mechanics of history, that is, a greater acuity of insight into the nature of character and motivation. Here, Livy was hampered by his commitment to the relentless display of virtue, and to the dramatic unity of his characters.[91] Many of Livy's characters appeared not only to be uniform and indistinguishable, but untrue and superficial.

While Mably claimed that Livy had been able to recur to the fountains of virtue and vice, and to penetrate "les abymes du coeur humain", and that his histories were capable of identifying and explaining the 'character' of the passions, it was apparent to most critics that Livy's conception of character was insufficiently complex, and that his depiction of men was too limited, stereotyped, and external. His use, in particular, of the rhetorical *harangue* as a natural and unforced means of expressing character, lost its validity in the eighteenth

[91] Nonetheless, Thomas Hunter defended both against the perverse display of vice and the bewildering inconsistency of many of Tacitus' characters. In addition, unlike Tacitus, Livy's characters were all conformable with the dignity and elevation of narrative history, and did not like those of Tacitus

century. It was praised by Mably and Monboddo for its ability to display character without resorting to the tricks and devices of formal characterisation, which represented for them too great an intrusion by the historian into the narrative: "characters and manners...are better expressed by making the characters speak for themselves than by any thing the author could say on the subject".[92] Moreover, Mably saw the *harangue* as the entry point for the historian into the realm of the internal, and a means of expressing the process of motivation clearly, coherently and naturally to the reader: by this means "nos pénétrons leurs secrets", and the reader received an intimate 'commerce' with the great men of the past.[93] The speech, indeed, could be of great service in revealing motivation, even when it was invented, as Thucydides had shown, and historians continued to use authentic speeches as a means of revealing character through documentation, their own words, a procedure that was similar to the revelation of character through letters in epistolary novels.[94] Nonetheless, the tide had turned against the Livian dramatic set-piece speech.

Livy's subject matter further reduced the effectiveness of his model of history for a modern audience. It was perceived that Livy had little to say concerning the nature of political action. His external and highly conventionalised means of revealing character was seen to representative of Livy's entire approach to historical writing, and of his choice of subject. As

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descend below that exalted level. Above all, the virtue of Livy's characters was a testament to the virtue of Livy's own character as a historian. Thomas Hunter, Ibid., p. 265.

[92] Burnet, Ibid., V, p. 13: "whereas the reader has nothing to do with the character of the historian".

[93] Gabriel Bonnot, Abbé de Mably, De la manière d'écrire l'histoire (Paris, 1783), pp. 124-126.

[94] On the access which letters gave into the internal regions of character, see T.Keymer, Richardson's Clarissa and the Eighteenth Century Reader (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 82: "one reads the epistolary novel not as a fiction but as a collection of documents from life". As Mark Phillips has shown, historians used actual documents for a similar purpose: see 'Reconsiderations on History and Antiquarianism: Arnaldo Momigliano and the Historiography of Eighteenth Century Britain', Journal of the History of Ideas 57 (1996), pp. 297-316. Robertson, as well as Hume and Gibbon, used speeches, but sparingly.

Gibbon famously remarked, in drawing attention to the essential differences between Tacitus and Livy: "You cross the Alps with Hannibal, but you are present at the council of Tiberius".[95] The shift from Livy to Tacitus was a shift from the external, dramatic and heroic to the real internal causes of action. Livy's use of character was martial, limited to the display of glory and valour, while Tacitus' interest in character was both 'philosophical' and studiedly detached, and recurred to the real and inexpressible springs of action. This involved a recognition that history needed to embrace the intangible, the abstract and the invisible, as well as the outward gestures and communications of men.

B. The Tacitean Model

For an eighteenth century audience, Tacitus was the master of the language of character and motivation. As we have seen, Smith saw him as the crucial innovator in the development of a new historiography:

> He had observed that those passages of the historians were most interesting which unfolded the effects the events related produced on the minds of the actors or spectators of those: he imagined therefore that if one could write a history consisting entirely of such events as were capable of interesting the minds of the Readers by accounts of the effects they produced or were of themselves capable of producing this effect on the reader.[96]

[95] Gibbon, Miscellaneous Works, p. 657.

Tacitus provided for the eighteenth century a model for a pure history of motives, and consequently for accurate and penetrating historical characterisation. As Lord Kames expressed it, "To draw a character is the master-stroke of description. In this Tacitus excels: his portraits are natural and lively, not a feature wanting or misplaced".[97] Tacitus' own masterpiece was the remarkable portrait that he had given of Tiberius in the *Annals*, which was both a vivid and disturbing insight into the nature of tyranny, and a perfectly handled exercise in the treatment of the evolution of character through time. As Edward Manwaring wrote: "His Characters judiciously discover the changes, turns and different impressions, human nature is subject to from the different periods and circumstances of our lives...His descriptions are the very voice of nature". Tacitus was also appreciated as an affecting historian, capable of touching the hearts of his readers. Hugh Blair lauded Tacitus' striking descriptions, pathetic sentiments, and his "many interesting exhibitions of human nature". [98] Ferguson expressly preferred Tacitus over Livy as a model for historians, because of his ability to reveal character naturally without indulging the affectation of authorial penetration, and to depict his actors "by [such] features or indications of characters Intentions and Effects as bring the merits benefits or suferings of Persons into view and strike the Reader with sentiments... In this Tacitus is a powerful { } of his Readers Heart".[99] John Hill, Professor of Humanity at Edinburgh, stressed the ability of Tacitus both to paint with extreme delicacy and minuteness the features of sensibility and feeling, and to place himself and the reader in

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[96] Smith, LRBL, pp. 111-112.
[97] Henry Home (Lord Kames), Elements of Criticism (London, 1823), Chapter XXI 'Narration and Description', pp. 371-391.
[98] Manwaring, Ibid., pp. 275-276. Hugh Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres (Dublin, 1793), II, p. 178.
[99] Ferguson, EUL MS. Dc. 1. 42: No. 3., ff. 17-18. { }:word illegible.

the situation and mind of the actor.[100] This overwhelming identification of Tacitus with the accurate and delicate portrayal of character continued into the nineteenth century: Macaulay pronounced him the greatest of the Latins, and proclaimed his affinity with both dramatists and novelists in the delineation of character.[101] The affiliation of Tacitus with sentimental novelists had not escaped the shrewd eye of Adam Smith, himself a devotee of the sentimental novel: Marivaux and Crebillon *fils* "resemble Tacitus as much as we can well imagine in works of so conterary [sic] a nature. They are Allways at great pains to account for every event by the temper and internall disposition of the severall actors in disquisitions that approach near to metaphysicall ones".[102] That the novel, a uniquely modern form, should act as the generic counterpart to Tacitus, while the epic poem or classical drama served to represent Livy, signifies the peculiar modernism of Tacitus' works.[103]

Tacitus' method of studying character, by a simultaneous chronological relation of events and penetration of motives, was preferred by Quintilian as the only means of truly

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[100] John Hill, 'An Essay upon the Principles of Historical Composition with an application of those principles to the writings of Tacitus', DC. 8. 174, ff. 363-385.

[101] Macaulay, 'History', Miscellaneous Writings, Speeches and Poems (London, 1880), pp. 55-107; p. 83.

[102] Smith, LRBL, p. 112.

[103] Charles Fornara has likened Tacitus to a drama critic, studying the actions and gestures of his protagonists with 'abnormal sensitivity': Fornara, Ibid., p. 89. S.G. Daitz has claimed that Tacitus was the first historian who provided a model for extensive character portrayal operating on a variety of levels throughout the narrative to produce a complex and layered 'stereoscopic' image of the historical character: 'Tacitus' Technique of Character Portrayal', American Journal of Philology, 81 (1960), pp. 30-52. M. M. Sage has enumerated some of the techniques which Tacitus exploited to achieve his heightened and subtle effects: his movement from externals to underlying moral and mental characteristics; his inquiry into the mental states of his characters; the gradual narrative build-up of character; the interplay, contrast and juxtaposition of characters; and the alternate use of both direct and suggestive modes of character portrayal: 'Portrayal of Character in 'The Histories', Tacitus' Historical Works: A Survey and Appraisal in Aufsteig und Niedergang der Romischen Welt , II, 33 (1990), pp. 853-1030. For Tacitus and character, see also Christopher Pelling, 'Tacitus and Germanicus', in T.J. Luce, and A.J. Woodman, Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition (Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 59-85. Christopher Pelling, 'The Question of Character-Development: Plutarch and Tacitus', Classical Quarterly 33, 2 (1983), pp. 469-487.

illuminating and explaining character: without the simultaneous revelation of external circumstances, the character would remain inexplicable. Nonetheless, despite this impeccable classical endorsement, critics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries believed that Tacitus had moved beyond formal rhetorical models of characterisation and into new 'philosophical' territory. Tacitus was the favoured historian of the Enlightenment *literati*, both in Britain and in France, as his works were more easily assimilated into the modern canon than those of many other ancients.[104] Indeed, as C. Volpilhac-Auger demonstrates, it was Tacitus who was seen to be the first truly philosophical historian, and a pattern to be followed or at least widely admired by modern *philosophes*: "les philosophes dans leur ensemble trouvent chez Tacite le modèle de leur méthode et l'échos de leurs propres préoccupations". As one French critic put it, "Tacite est sans comparaison le plus grand des historiens aux yeux d'un philosophe. Il a peint les hommes avec tant d'énergie, de finesse et de vérité".[105] Fontenelle located both the philosophy and the modernism of Tacitus in his penetration of motives and characters:

> À cette manière d'écrire l'histoire en succeda une plus parfaite qui entrait dans les motifs et dans les caracteres et c'est celle-là qui a toujours été dans les siècles polis et savants. Elle ressemble assez à celle dont on fait un système de philosophie...
> L'historien a aussi un certain nombre de faits dont il imagine les motifs et sur

[104] Two notable exceptions are Voltaire and Adam Smith, both of whom apparently preferred Livy. This came as a surprise to the surprise of the author of The Bee (May 1791), who felt that Smith would have plumped for Polybius: reprinted in Smith, LRBL, p. 229.
[105] C. Volpilhac-Auger, Tacite en France de Montesquieu à Chateaubriand (Voltaire Foundation, Oxford, 1993), p.189.

> lesquels il bâtit le mieux qu'il peut son système d'histoire...Tacite et Descartes me paraissent deux grands inventeurs de systèmes en deux espèces différentes. [106]

Fontenelle recognised the strong element of artifice in both philosophical history and Tacitean history: that, using the principles of probability, they both imagined causes for the appearances which they observed, and then connected them 'as best they could' into an invented system.[107] Both Smith and Fontenelle identified Tacitus as in some sense a 'philosophical' systems-builder, but Smith defended Tacitus' approach to historical narrative as legitimate, furnishing men with "a science no less usefull, to wit, the knowledge of the motives by which men act".[108]

Tacitus' 'philosophical' revelation of motives was however firmly grounded in the world of politics. Thus, he was the most practically useful of historical writers. As Richard Tuck has persuasively argued, Tacitus was the primer for reason-of-state theorists and neo-Stoics in their evolution of a theory of interest as the basis of political action.[109] The utility of Tacitus was contrasted by Justus Lipsius with mere entertainment, and barren entertainment at that, afforded by Livy: "this writer deals with princely courts, with the inner life of princes, their plans, commands and actions" in contrast to the purely external realm of wars, the 'dismal

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[106] Fontenelle, Bernard le Bovier de, 'Sur l'histoire', Oeuvres Complètes: Tome III (ed. Alain Niderst; Paris, 1989), pp. 169-185.

[107] On system and its meanings for the eighteenth century, see J.C. Bryce, 'Lectures on rhetoric and belles lettres', in Peter Jones and Andrew S. Skinner (eds.), Adam Smith Reviewed (Edinburgh University Press, 1992), pp. 1-20: pp. 15-18.

[108] Smith, LRBL, pp. 111-114: The notes continue: "a science too that could not be learned from..." followed, maddeningly, by a gap: it can only be speculated that Smith believed that this was not a science that could be learned from more conventional modes of writing history.

[109] Richard Tuck, Philosophy and Government 1572-1651 (Cambridge University Press, 1993). See also Gerhard Oestreich, Neostoicism and the early modern state (edited by Brigitta Oestreich and H.G.

victories' of Hannibal.[110] The modernity of Tacitus to the eighteenth century was due in part to the fact that the analysis of the modern political world that had developed since the sixteenth century had been so largely influenced by Tacitus. His *Annals* was the key text for the redefinition of the nature of power, prudence and interest. Even in his style, staccato and disconnected, studded with reflections and political maxims, Tacitus provided a pattern for a new history in the sixteenth century. Felix Gilbert argues that the work of Guicciardini, perhaps the most influential of the Tacitean historians, prevented history from collapsing into mere political treatise, since Guicciardini realised that "historical writings could disclose insights which could be expressed in no other way".[111] Nonetheless, it was recognised that Guicciardini's history represented a new kind of history which probed the political world with greater rigour and particularity of detail than conventional rhetorical historiography. Paolo Sarpi had apologised for the unclassical appearance of his *Istoria del Concilio Tridentino*, one of the key texts of the Tacitean canon: "I am not ignorant of the lawes of Histories, and how they differ from Annals, & Diaries. I knowe likewise that the narration of uniform accidents, breedeth satiety in the writer, & tediousnesse in the reader". Yet it was necessary for the historian to descend into the *minutiae* of detail in order to draw out from close analysis the essential guides for action.[112] The examination of prudence lay at the heart of these histories, that 'faculty of deliberation about particulars' which enabled the actor to confront and overcome fortune and circumstance. Prudence was a question of decorum and propriety: it measured the political agent's ability to adapt to a given context, to shift his

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Koenigsburger; translated by David McLintock; Cambridge University Press, 1982), which argues that it was Tacitus who formed the basis for the scientific treatment of practical politics, p. 5.

[110] Quoted in Tuck, Ibid., p. 46.

[111] Gilbert, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, p. 253.

[112] Fra Paolo Sarpi, History of the Council of Trent (trans. Nathaniel Brent, London, 1629), I, p. 269.

position successfully in accordance with the fickleness of circumstances.[113] The Taciteans, under the influence of Machiavelli, but with great attention to the teachings of Tacitus, shifted the study of politics and therefore history away from primarily moral considerations, and thereby undermined the naïve notion of exemplarity as the straightforward translation of past into future greatness. Rather, the only value of history lay in a minute dissection of particular events and situations, none of which could be easily appropriated for pragmatic application to the real world: this required real study and judgement.[114] Nonetheless it was the histories of Tacitus that came closest to providing guides for action and patterns for the study of the modern world.

Tacitus was taken up by neo-Stoics such as Justus Lipsius who saw in him an antidote to the misleading and dangerous vacuity of humanist celebrations of glory and virtue. Tacitus' histories were located in a dangerous and complex world, in which the manipulation and ruthlessness of the ruler was matched by the volatility and chaos of the people. From their close reading of Tacitus, the Taciteans and neo-Stoics were able to produce an analysis of the modern political world that was both frightening and persuasive. They were the first to appreciate that the new politics of the sixteenth century was located in the access of strength given to states by emergence of a standing army and new forms of finance which gave enormous power to the princes of the new states. From this basic observation, they developed a thesis concerning the nature of the new power that the princes wielded. The development of armies meant that Europe had become a dangerous arena in which the strong nations

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[113] Victoria Kahn, Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance (Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 9-10. See also Victoria Kahn, '*Virtu* and the Example of Agathocles in Machiavelli's Prince', Representations 13 (1986), pp. 63-83.

potentially subjugated, or at least cowed, the weak. They were the first historians to appreciate the importance of Europe as a confluence of interests, all of which required to be harmonised. From this scenario, Taciteans extracted the concept of balance, and especially of a balance of interests which would ensure harmony.[115] The ideal of Taciteans, both within and outwith individual states, was moderation, mediation, and the adroit balancing of potentially destructive forces. The prudence of the prince resided in his ability to perceive and adhere to the true interest of the state without being deflected from the pursuit of that public interest by turbulent and dangerous passions, or by narrow and partial considerations. Prudence acted as a potential safeguard against the violent forces of faction and hatred. In performing this difficult and intricate task, much was permitted the prince. The ideals of the Taciteans were modified by their unflinching and unsentimental confrontation with the nature of power, and this led to their tendency to palliate the crimes of the ruler by their sympathetic appreciation of the problems which he faced. Thus, in many ways, Tacitean history read like a defence of vicious *realpolitik*, especially in its endorsement of dissimulation and manipulation. The prince was enjoined to study the character of the people whom he governed, not only to divine their true interest, but also in order to subjugate and outmanoeuvre them if necessity demanded it. However, with their realistic and acute reading of the nature of modern political power, Taciteans were able to move history into new

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[114] Timothy Hampton, Writing From History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature (Cornell University Press, 1990).

[115] Tuck, Ibid., pp. 95-96. The concept of a balance of interests throughout Europe, first introduced by Guicciardini, was the cornerstone of Bolingbroke's historiography, and indeed of almost all thinking on the nature of diplomacy in the eighteenth century. See Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, Letters on the Study and Use of History (London, 1870), p. 59. Jeremy Black, 'Empire and Enlightenment in Edward Gibbon's Treatment of International Relations', International History Review 17 (1995), pp. 441-58.

territory, and to find new ways of representing character with greater accuracy and dispassionate impartiality.[116]

The lessons that they taught subsequent historians, not least Robertson, were compelling. Firstly, they were concerned to depict situations and characters of considerable moral complexity, refusing to reduce characters to simple and essentially moralistic categories. Their attempt to provide a context by which to assess the pursuit of interest tended to allow them to bypass the mechanism of praise and blame that dominated the rhetorical writing of history. This lent to their characterisations a certain ambiguity of treatment, especially in the portrayal of individuals who were otherwise easily assimilated into conventional moral descriptions. A good example of this tendency is Davila's supreme management of the character of Catherine de Medici, which despite Davila's 'nominal' bias is remarkably balanced, an exercise in the kind of partial exculpation in which Robertson indulged on a number of occasions. Indeed Davila's portrait hid behind the skirts of narrative contextualisation, and a concomitant scepticism concerning historical portraiture: "The qualities of this lady...may be better comprehended by the context of things that have been related, than described by any pen, or represented in a few words".[117] Moreover, the perceived interest of the state permitted many things which might otherwise fall foul of historical judgement. Thus, dissimulation was sanctioned if it enabled a people to avoid the chaos of civil war: this was because the collapse and disintegration of authority was more dangerous to the interests of the people than the infringements of conventional morality by

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[116] Tuck, Ibid., pp. 103-104.

[117] Enrico Caterino Davila, The Historie of the Civil Warres in France (London, 1620), pp. 755-757: her chief quality was "her prudence always abounding with fitting determinations to remedy the sudden chances of fortune".

rulers.[118] Interest dictated prudence, and thus all judgements concerning history, and all the machinery of characterisation, needed to be referred back to the nature of interest. This did not, although many critics of Tacitean history felt that it did, entail the eclipse of virtue. It did mean, however, a considerable complication of the narrative process.

The intangible but crucial concept of interest caused a significant deepening of historical narrative, since this interest was dependent upon many different and shifting circumstances which required full explication by the historian. No event could be properly assessed until the interest which prompted it, and provided its justification, could be understood. Thus, Paolo Sarpi's *History of Ecclesiastical Benefices* was in part a meditation on the institutional basis of interest, tracing the effect of a modification in interests upon not only the behaviour but also the beliefs of the papacy. Sarpi had written that "A change in interests draws along with it, both a change and even a contradiction in doctrines".[119] As David Wootton has argued, Sarpi, like Guicciardini before him, saw character as primarily the product of interests, and the role of the historian as the ruthless unmasking of motivations. Moreover, the *Istoria del Concilio Tridentino* was "not a portrait of the foibles of the popes as men, but of their astuteness as rulers": Sarpi was not interested in their personal characteristics, but in the social-institutional bases of their motives.[120] For all of these reasons, Tacitus and his followers were regarded as the most "acute, penetrating, and reflecting" of historiographers,

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[118] See Francis Bacon's essay on 'Dissimulation'. Ian Box, 'Bacon's Essays: From Political Science to Political Prudence', History of Political Thought 3 (1982), pp. 31-49.
[119] Paolo Sarpi, Of Beneficiary Matters or the Dues of the Altar, Being a Compleat History of Ecclesiastical Benefices (London, 1730), Chapter XLVIII p. 213.
[120] Wootton, Ibid., pp. 112-113: Sarpi was the "Great Unmasker", in the words of Milton.

in the words of Hugh Blair, and they were looked to as the means of unlocking the secrets of human prudence.[121]

Nonetheless, Tacitus was a problematic model for modern historians. In many ways he did not appear to be any more of a usable historical model than Livy. As Fontenelle had hinted, his 'philosophical' qualities seemed to be incompatible with modern notions of historical scholarship. While Hugh Blair wrote that "The philosopher, the poet and the historian all meet in him", he confessed that despite this versatility Tacitus did not meet the criteria for a historian. He was too 'refined', concise and cryptic in his judgements, and his narration was too obscure and abrupt: "History seems to require a more, natural, flowing and popular manner".[122] Smith too saw Tacitus' concentration on internal motives, and his comparative neglect of external events, as a serious flaw, since it meant that his history lacked connection, and this threatened to overturn the very nature of narrative. Ferguson likewise saw Tacitus' style as in some ways inimical to a narrative presentation: "In his stile in general he resembles most the painters who work by a...masterly stroke that touch the leading points of Character than by a full and finished expression of every Part."[123] Also, Tacitus was seen to be a supremely manipulative historian, whose own interventions in the text, in the form of reflections, asides, 'insinuations', destroyed the faith to be placed in the narrative. Tacitus' subject-matter was likewise open to intense criticism. In particular, Tacitus' apparent neglect of the moralistic function of historiography in favour of a kind of political hyper-realism, was seen by classical moralists as simply perverse. It was claimed that in paying more attention to the delineation of political motives than to the moral qualities of the actor, his

[121] Blair, LRBL, II, pp. 178-180.
[122] Ibid.

narratives were steeped in an irredeemable cynicism which appeared to delight in the frustration and defeat of virtuous action. Tacitus' exclusively political orientation was also seen as restrictive by those who sought to move history outside the restrictive bounds of the *arcana imperii*, and his incisive subtlety led to the claim by hostile critics that his characterisations were too minute to be anything other than speculation and sophistry. [124] Saint Evremond had complained that Tacitus' tendency towards political subtlety vitiated history's aim to explore questions of character and human nature: he "turns all into Politicks, and makes a mystery of every thing, ascribing all to craft and address, and little or nothing to a man's Constitution". [125] Thomas Hunter angrily proclaimed that the "province of history is not professedly to teach Politics". In Tacitus' history, Hunter argued, there is too much "political finesse": "Refinement, Artifice and Dissimulation make a part of almost every Character in Tacitus". [126]

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[123] Smith, LRBL, p. 100; Ferguson EUL MS. Dc. 1. 42: No. 3. , f. 17.

[124] Both Thomas Hunter and René Rapin contended that Tacitus' contortions had produced essentially only characterisations of Tacitus himself. In this way, Tacitus' formidable insight into the nature of passions, which all critics acknowledged, was reduced to a mere expression of the disfigurement of Tacitus' own character. Thomas Hunter, Ibid., pp. 94-96, pp. 168-187 ; Rapin, 'Instructions pour l'histoire', pp. 156-158.

[125] Letter to the Comte de Lionne (1668): Charles Marguetel de Saint Denis, Seigneur de Saint Evremond, Letters (ed. John Hayward, London, 1930), p. 60. See his 'Observations sur Salluste et sur Tacite' Critique Littéraire (ed. Maurice Wilmotte, Paris, 1921). Nonetheless, despite this, Tacitus was also seen as a champion of virtue and of classical republican values. See Thomas Gordon, Works of Tacitus and Political Discourses (London, 1728).

[126] Thomas Hunter, Ibid.: Tacitus, in seeking to turn history into an experiment in political writing, had warped and disfigured all of his characters, and thereby misrepresented human nature. Ironically, however, Tacitus in turning history into politics had also descended beneath the dignity of history, and had given the characters of criminals, slaves, women, all those who should be outside the scope of a narrative of public affairs. For Hunter, Tacitus was not a historian, but a Satyrist, Orator, Poet, Moralist, Wit, "& a Politician more than all". Hunter's association of Tacitean characterisation Tacitus with the mechanistic and reductive characterisations of cardinal de Retz was however acute: the French *moralistes* of the seventeenth century, with their aim to analyse the soul of man as a piece of machinery, owed much to the Tacitean idiom.

Tacitean characterisation was therefore potentially problematic, and needed to be treated with circumspection. It was not capable of historical verification, and depended too greatly upon the subtle and mysterious process of the 'penetration' of the historian. Only great experience in the world of politics could qualify a man to judge of it.[127] Charles Mackie, Robertson's teacher at Edinburgh University, expressed in lectures his essential distrust of the Tacitean mode:

> ...he is reckoned a too political but not a plain historian, he dives always into the secret springs of actions, rather than satisfying himself with a simple narration of facts...his stile is not all alike, sometimes it is concise and obscure, & then again plain and easy however he is not to be read but by learned men, he being of great value among Politicians.[128]

Essentially, Tacitus was a historian for the *homme politique*, and not the ordinary reader.[129] The nature of political action was too volatile and complex to be brought within the comprehension of those outside the political classes, or contained within a simple narrative of events. Nonetheless, it promised to unlock the secrets of the mind and heart, and to provide an anatomy of political action and motivation in a way that was locked out from the perception of most men. For this reason, it remained a viable model for a historian such as Robertson, fully committed to the unmasking and penetration of the political world.

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[127] There is a certain circularity here, since much of his knowledge of politics would be drawn from readings of Tacitean historians.
[128] Charles Mackie, 'Mackie's Lectures on Universal History, taken by a student 1747/8', Edinburgh University Library MS La.III.237. Lecture 65: f. 257.

[129] Thomas Gordon made the same point: Tacitus' work was not intended for the populace, but for governors. Gordon, Ibid., unpaginated 'Dedication' to Robert Walpole.

Chapter Three

The History of Manners and the Diversification of Historical Characterisation

1. Introduction

The eighteenth century witnessed the fracturing of history into many different forms and styles. At the end of the century, John Hill, Professor of Humanity at Edinburgh, wrote in an essay upon 'Historical Composition', "Few terms in the English Language are... less accurately defined than the term History".[130] Many critics felt that there was a lacuna of firm guidelines for historical writing: as Peter Whalley wrote, "the Directions which they [i.e. historians] have given us for composing History, lie scattered throughout their pieces in a very irregular order".[131] Indeed, a number of historians deliberately set aside the prescriptions of the *ars historica* as vacuous or, at best, simply inapplicable to the type of history which they wished to produce. Laurence Echard's pose of modesty was typical: the ideal historian envisaged by Le Moyne and René Rapin was far above his limited abilities, and their rules were not suited to a popular history consisting of 'broken materials' to which notions of formal perfection and unity could not apply.[132] Paul de Rapin Thoyras explicitly attacked the rules themselves for their absurd idealism: "elles supposent dans l'Ecrivain, des qualitez qui sont assez rares, comme, une grande étendue d'ésprit & de connoissances, un goût exquis, beaucoup de discernement". They offered nothing more than empty commonplaces which every educated man could easily perceive for himself, and no practical guidance for the aspiring historian: "Quelques-uns de ces Règles sont si vagues, qu'on peut les regarder comme étant à peu-près inutiles". Hence, Rapin Thoyras rejected all models for historical writing other than those conformable to the historian's *génie* and the particular

[130] John Hill, 'An Essay Upon the Principles of Historical Composition, with an application of these Principles to the writings of Tacitus', EUL MS Dc.8.174, fols. 363-385.
[131] Peter Whalley, An Essay on the Manner of Writing History (London, 1746; Augustan Reprint Society, 80, Los Angeles, 1960): Preface (unpaginated).

demands of his subject.[133] Such declarations of independence from the formal rhetorical rules of history greatly aided the school of 'philosophical' historians who attempted to reshape historical forms in the later eighteenth-century. Indeed, Gudin de la Brenellerie explicitly cited Rapin Thoyras in his attempt to vindicate the new experimental history from the attacks of the Abbé de Mably. Mably, Gudin demonstrated, could not find a consistent and formally perfect classical model: rather, history was a uniquely flexible form, capable of adapting itself to new conditions and subjects almost endlessly, and therefore could not be tied down to sterile rules and formulae.[134]

The progressive liberation of historians from the formal narrative was a response to growing dissatisfaction by historians and critics with the conventional narrative form, and to the demands of a public whose taste for historical works was changing in the eighteenth century, partly as a result of the development of new more elastic genres such as the novel and the biography. These twin pressures on historical narrative exerted their force in different ways, and increased the diversification of history into new and more elaborate forms. On the one hand, the critique of narrative developed by the *érudits* of the Dutch 'Critical Enlightenment' led to a serious reconsideration of the role and purpose of historical narrative, a greater sensitivity to factual inaccuracy, and a general suspicion of narrative accounts. On the other, the rise of less formal genres bordering upon historiography challenged the supremacy of the history of public events as a means of revealing character. With the rhetorical status of history under challenge from various forms of scholarship, other forms of writing were able

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[132] Laurence Echard, History of England (London, 1708), I, unpaginated preface.
[133] Paul de Rapin Thoyras, Histoire d'Angleterre (8 vols.; La Haye, 1724), I, p.ii.
[134] Gudin de la Brenellerie, Supplement à la manière d'écrire l'histoire; ou réponse à l'ouvrage de M. l'Abbé de Mably (Paris, 1784), pp. 194-195.

to claim that they could make a more searching and penetrative insight into the nature of mankind's actions and character than public history could. In a recrudescence of the Aristotelian critique, history was claimed to be confined to the particular and the external, and, in terms of subject matter, limited to the frequently immoral and meaningless exercises in brutality and deception that frequently made up the history of events. The claims made by conventional historians as to their penetration of 'human character' were therefore limited by a combination of scepticism with a sense that history was not a flexible enough medium for the revelation of character. Nevertheless, despite this sharpening of the critique of historical narrative in the eighteenth century, history proved able to adapt itself to these new critical and competitive conditions. With the various projects associated with the 'history of manners', philosophical history and theoretical history, history was able to diversify itself, in order to provide a richer and more satisfying reading of character. New forms arose, which strove to satisfy the desire for a truthful revelation of private character. The eighteenth century, as Mark Phillips, has recently argued, witnessed a remarkable and hitherto unexplored diversity of historical forms: the search for a 'new plan' upon which to write history gave rise to an extraordinary proliferation of experiments in historical writing. This was connected, Phillips contends, with a determination to uncover private realms of experience previously untouched by the narrative of the *arcana imperii*, and the texture of ordinary lives. [135] Whether it was the 4-stage theory or the Voltairean history of *moeurs*, this new history expressed itself in the language of character: either the private, internal character of individuals, or the inner principles of groups, nations and societies.

[135] Mark Phillips, 'Reconsiderations on History and Antiquarianism: Arnaldo Momigliano and the Historiography of Eighteenth Century Britain', Journal of the History of Ideas 57 (1996), pp. 297-316.

What is remarkable is that it was by extending the principle and method of character, that area of historical writing most subject to critical pressure, that history was able to stake its claim to function as a modern and meaningful form. Historical characterisation was subject to three critiques, the sceptical, the novelistic and the 'philosophical': it is necessary to look at these in turn in order to understand how historical narrative adapted successfully to new expectations, and the choices that were available to Robertson.

The Sceptical Critique

As we have seen in the cases of both Livy and Tacitus, conventional rhetorical narrative was increasingly subject to historical scepticism, and character was the most vulnerable aspect of narrative to sceptical demolition. Character had always been at the heart of problems concerning the falsification of historical narrative. Charles Fornara contends that it was the growing concern with character that caused the public history of the later Roman empire to decline into forms of laudatory biography, with character not simply a rhetorical tool or ornament but the organising principle of history. The process had begun with Callisthenes and the other historians of Alexander, and by the time of Tacitus and Plutarch had become a deeply entrenched abuse, resulting in histories structured entirely around the reigns of emperors, and therefore admirably suited to the distortion of history into panegyric or invective.[136] It could be said that the eighteenth century was another such period, in which the obsessive concern with characterisation appeared to many to threaten the very basis of

[136] Charles William Fornara, The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome (University of California Press, 1983), especially pp. 185-189: so that with Plutarch, "Character is studied in its own right, almost independently of the political framework of historiography in which it had served a functional purpose", p. 187.

historical truth. Character threatened to carry historical narrative across the unstable generic boundaries that separated history from fiction, and alternatively history from biography, that is the exclusive concern with the representation of a single character or individual. The *Monthly Review* complained of the modern tendency to write histories of single reigns, suggesting that such histories necessarily fell into the trap of relating all of the events of the age to a single dominating figure. The reviewer attempted to claim that this was a peculiarly modern abuse:

> ...several modern historians, dazzled, probably, by the splendour of a royal name, instead of being directed in the extent of their period by the nature of events which appeared before them, have confined themselves to the casual limit of a single life.[137]

This resulted in a truncated history, abrupt in its beginning and unfinished in its end. It represented a shift of history away from the structure provided by events and great revolutions, for the sake of the apparent unity provided by a single life, which need not even necessarily be that of the chief actor in the events of the age. The complaint that the structure of history was being distorted by subordinating history to the shape of a single life was a common one, and disturbing. If history collapsed into biography, it would inevitably lose sight of events as its *sine qua non*. While character was an essential by-product of narrative, if instead it shaped the narrative, then the validity of characterisations would be called into question, since characters would no longer be narratively constituted. The historical character derived its especial instructive value, as well as truth-status, from its relationship with the narrative: to detach them would be to weaken both.

As for the language of motivation, there had always been a problem with the claims made by the historian to Tacitean penetration of hidden motives. William Camden, in the midst of an account of Queen Elizabeth's apparent commiseration with the plight of Mary Stuart, gave *in parentheses* a formula which all readers of history understood: "For who can dive into the secret Meanings of Princes? & wise men do keep their Thoughts locked up within the Closet of their Breasts".[138] All histories were written with this tacit admission in mind. As Felix Gilbert has shown, such claims in historical narrative were simply accepted, despite the absence of a mechanism of authentication: this was the rhetorical duty of *inventio* laid down by the *ad herennium.*[139] Yet the changing nature of historical scholarship in the eighteenth century rendered this cavalier approach to authentication difficult to accept in the eyes of some. The problem of historical 'conjecture' had already exercised the mind of no less a critic than Thomas Hobbes, who argued that "subtle conjectures" of the secret aims of the protagonists was an affectation of subtlety on the part of the historian, and a means of placing the historian before the narrative. They could only be validated by the narrative and the reader: "but these conjectures cannot often be certain, unless withal so evident, that the narration itself may be sufficient to suggest the same to the reader". In that case, the historian's intervention would be nugatory.[140] René Rapin, who, as we have seen, was a staunch advocate of the history of the interior principles of action, nonetheless also conceded

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[137] Monthly Review 70, Jan-July 1784: pp. 418-419: This was perhaps a veiled reference to Robertson's *History of Charles V*, although the reviewer probably had in mind Voltaire or his imitators.
[138] William Camden, The History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess Elizabeth (4th edition, London, 1688), p. 110.
[139] Felix Gilbert, Machiavelli and Guicciardini; Politics and History in Sixteenth Century Florence (Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 216-218. On the rhetorical basis of historiography, see John F. Tinkler, 'The Rhetorical Method of Francis Bacon's *History of the Reign of King Henry VII*', History and Theory 26 (1987), pp. 32-52.

that too many historians fell into their greatest errors by the application of 'conjectures' to events, which led them to assign to those events uncertain or frivolous motives.[141] Vicesimus Knox, writing at the end of the eighteenth century, at a time in which the language of motivation had colonised historical narrative to a much greater extent than at any previous period, specifically targeted the revelation of motives as the weak link in historical narrative. Given the endless disputes of historians over matters of external fact, Knox asked "how much less credit can be given to their depictions of characters, & descriptions of motives for actions, secret councils and designs, to which none was a witness but the bosom which entertained them? Yet many historians kindly communicate all ...the very foundations on which the splendid fabric of history is to be erected, are destitute of solidity". History could offer only entertainment, "the charms of style, eloquence, & poetical painting". For solid instruction, Knox indicated chronological tables.[142]

Such a distrust of the excessive use of the language of motivation and characterisation was a notable feature of the Dutch 'Critical Enlightenment' of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Such critics saw the potential for the abuse of history heightened by the rise of political and religious factionalism in the seventeenth century: the age-old corruptions of narrative, panagyric and invective, were thus given a sharp and compelling edge by modern conditions. Any claim to produce an impartial narrative needed to be examined with great care in such intense circumstances, where even the most apparently neutral narrative

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[140] Thomas Hobbes' preface to Thucydides, in Donald R. Kelley (ed.), Versions of History from Antiquity to the Enlightenment (Yale University Press, 1991), p. 303.
[141] René Rapin censured Herrera for this fault: Instructions pour l'histoire (Brussels, 1714), p. 143.
[142] Vicesimus Knox, Winter Evenings, or Lucubrations (8), BE, 42, pp. 59-66: histories were merely "historical romances, founded sometimes on fact, but capriciously related according to the historian's prejudices, party, or misrepresentation, and fantastically embellished by the false colours of poetry and rhetoric".

description could be drawn from a partisan source. Thus, Rapin Thoyras claimed of descriptions of battles and sieges, "la plupart ne sont tirées que des relations d'un des partis, qui sont le plus souvent déguisées".[143] Even the absence of rhetorical colouring and adornment could betoken a tacit affiliation to a particular cause. As such, the very materials of history, the testimonies of the participants themselves, were tainted at source, and had to be treated with extreme caution. In the absence of an ideal community of readership, history became a battleground through which the reader had to navigate a safe path. For this reason, sophisticated historical critics such as Pierre Bayle and his one-time adversary Jean Le Clerc devoted their time and energy to the source-criticism of narrative accounts, rather than to the construction of them. They preferred to provide commentaries on historical texts, to explode claims to a unitary truth, to detect and expose falsehoods, and thereby to neutralise the effects of party. [144] Bayle was the dominant influence on the historiography of the early eighteenth-century, yet he was not, and did not claim to be, a historian: as Hayden White has pointed out, Bayle himself continued to regard history first and foremost as the production of coherent narrative accounts.[145] For Bayle's own followers, such as Charles Mackie, Professor of Universal History at Edinburgh from 1719 and Robertson's teacher, the coherent, ordered narrative history, largely the product of the Renaissance, represented a great advance on the 'monkish' chronicles of medieval scholars. What these textual critics sought was to purge the narrative of all distortions and impurities, to return to a classical idea of purity and transparency in narrative. Yet Bayle's own efforts to show the inadequacy of narrative accounts rendered such a task as the conscientious construction and verification of a

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[143] Rapin Thoyras, I, p. ii.
[144] On Bayle, see Ruth Whelan, The Anatomy of superstition: a study of the historical theory and practice of Pierre Bayle (Oxford, 1989).
[145] Hayden White, Metahistory (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), pp. 48-49.

historical narrative in modern conditions problematic. In addition, the retreat of historians from political engagement, and the parallel withdrawal of politicians from historiographical expression, made the disjunction between the worlds of politics and scholarship too difficult to bridge. The separation of historians from the political sphere was part of a widespread crisis of authority that eighteenth century historians were to face, and their pronouncements on the nature of political action were to be treated by many with contempt.[146]

Mackie's main theoretical statement on the nature of history was a lecture read to the Edinburgh Philosophical Society in 1741 entitled a 'dissertation on the sources of errors in history'. In it, he argued the need to mediate between the dual evils of imposition and scepticism. It was clear, however, from the tenor of his argument that it was the former rather than the latter that he regarded as the greatest threat to history. Both ancient and modern history had discovered different techniques for imposing upon the reader, and extracting his assent to their readings of history: "writers have often been blinded by passions & strong prejudices arising from a regard to their *country* or *religion.* ...a violent passion to favor a particular sect or party...This has always been the fate of History, & must continue so long as men are under the influence of passions & prejudice, & addicted to parties":

> Now mankind being divided in their opinion with regard to things of such high importance, & with so much bitterness; it is easy to be conceived that the causes & sources of all these disorders & mischiefs, as well as the facts themselves, must be

[146] Philip Hicks, Historical Culture from Clarendon to Hume: The Fortunes of Classic British History, 1671-1757 (Ph.D. Diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1988); Neoclassical History and English Culture (London, 1996).

> differently represented by the several historians, as they were addicted to this or t'other religious sect or party.

The ancient counterpart to this deliberate falsification had been the use of "fine language" and rhetoric, which reduced history to fable, and which made the Latin historians in particular difficult to credit.[147] It was necessary therefore to be vigilant, and by a process of careful comparison and an insistent demand for 'authentick vouchers' to root out all traces of falsehood. The modern historian could only piece together what fragments of truth there may be left through probability; even that may not be a reliable guide, since even the probable may be untrue, especially if it serve to 'amuse' rather than instruct the reader:

> The Roman historians don't pique themselves upon examining scrupulously: They seldom are at any pains to distinguish truth from falsehood. If some ancient historian has related a fact, which is not absolutely improbable, & which is accompanied with some agreeable circumstances to amuse the readers, they think it unnecessary to examine the reasons there may be for doubting of it.[148]

Mackie's suspicion of the role of the passions in history made him a rather austere critic: he denied that it was any part of the function of history to move and divert its readers; any semblance of passion in history would simply serve the interests of party, and would therefore corrupt both historian and readers. The function of history was not to arouse passions or affections, but to soothe, neutralise and counteract them. In that sense, history

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[147] Charles Mackie, 'A dissertation on the sources of errors in history and how to detect and verify them, read to the Philosophical Society March 1741', EUL MS La. II. 37, f. 18. On 'fine language', see 'Rules for judging of ye truth of History', EUL MS Dc. 8. 24, ff. 172.
[148] EUL MS La. II. 37, ff. 20-21.

sought not to move but to create an equipoise and stasis, an harmonious balance, in the reader's mind.

It was through Mackie and his influence on Scottish historical thought that Robertson would first have become acquainted with the historical scepticism of the Dutch critics. Educated partly in the Netherlands, Mackie's intellectual orientation was towards the Francophone and Latinised culture of the Dutch universities and press in the early years of the eighteenth century. The most powerful formative influence on Mackie's historical thought was probably Pierre Bayle.[149] From Bayle and his followers, and from his own knowledge of Scottish history, Mackie learnt a distrust of the dangerous role that history could play in the fomentation and perpetuation of political and religious faction. Mackie saw his own role as a historical scholar as the scrutiny, validation and comparison of contrasting historical accounts. Mackie's *Lectures on Universal History* were as a result exercises in the discrimination of partiality and falsehood, and the explosion of unified narrative accounts which purported to represent the unitary truth. Adopting the stance of a commentator upon a set text, Mackie achieved a distance from the recital of events that enabled him to intervene to correct the chronology of the text, or to modify its judgements. His assumption of chronology as the structural basis of his lectures represented his attempt to prevent the imposition of a false pattern upon history, to rest his history upon a solid bed of irrefutable fact.[150] His almost obsessive compilation of chronologies, lists, tables, and catalogues as the

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[149] For Mackie's use of Bayle, see his Commonplace Book, Edinburgh University Library MS DC. 8. 24, *passim*; Alphabetical Biographical Dictionary compiled from Bayle and Morer, EUL MS Dc. 8. 50. Mackie was involved in an attempt by T. Johnson, a bookseller in Rotterdam, to raise a subscription for a Scottish edition of Bayle's works: see Letters to Mackie, EUL MS La. II. 91, no. 34, May 1722.

[150] 'Mackie's Lectures on Universal History, taken by a student 1747/8', EUL MS La.III.237. For a short account of Mackie's lecture course, see Scots Magazine 3 (1741), pp. 372-373.

essential reference points of universal history, likewise sought to ground history upon a stable and indisputable basis. If Bayle and Peter Burmann, his teacher at Leiden, were Mackie's models as critics, the other influence upon Mackie's historical thought was Isaac Newton, and especially his work on chronology. Mackie published nothing, but he did project at various times a critical edition of Buchanan's works, and a chronological table of the ancient world. He also began a translation of Livy, of which a portion survives.[151] Mackie illustrates perfectly how the historical culture of the early eighteenth century was torn between a study of classical literature, which sensitised alert critics to the dangers of rhetoric, and the burgeoning interests in numismatics, population studies and chronology, all various attempts to find in history a principle of certainty. It may be significant that Mackie, while he saw the detection of error as his principal function, did not himself seek to produce a narrative history. He may have felt the task beyond him, for a variety of reasons. Mackie, in seeking to avoid the distortions of narrative, had in fact also thrown out of history the essence of narrative, the systematic production of a chain of cause and effect, and especially the intimate probing of motives, the secrets of the mind, which were quite obviously pressure-points in the history which allowed the intrusion of falsehood and invention. Even in his lectures, Mackie sought to minimise the narrative task of tracing causes and motives. This was the complaint of one of Mackie's successors to the chair of history at Edinburgh, Alexander Fraser Tytler, who lamented the retreat into mere chronicle that Mackie's lecture practice represented: it was "a strict chronological arrangement of events upon the plan of Turselline's *Epitome*" that "furnishes only a dry chronicle of events, which nothing connects

[151] 'A general table of Chronology', EUL MS. La. III. 253. His Commonplace books are filled with catalogues, genealogies, and lists: see EUL MS. DC. 5. 24. It was Peter Burmann, Mackie's teacher at Leiden, who suggested the Buchanan project: see Burmann to Mackie, 27th April 1724, EUL MS La.

together but the order of time". [152] By choosing the incontrovertible sequence of time, without adornments or additions, Mackie attempted to prevent error from seeping into the very arrangement of his history. As we have seen, Mackie joined in the general wariness of critics towards Tacitean penetration. However, he did not deny that it was possible for such a history to be not only true but useful, but its use was confined closely to a worldly political elite. Mackie wished to avoid diving too deeply into the recesses of particular history with its doubtful analysis of motives. As Frank E. Manuel has written of Newton: "He had precious little interest in historical character or motivation...In the end his passion for realistic detail shrivelled the past to a chronological table and a list of place-names".[153] Mackie was a humanist, and in many ways in his eclecticism foreshadowed the history of manners, but his retreat from narrative marks him out strongly from his pupil Robertson. [154]

The 'search for proofs' was a general problem in Scottish educational thought in the early eighteenth century, and was by no means confined to Mackie.[155] Robertson himself confronted this central problem in a student essay for John Stevenson's Logic class

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II. 91, no. 41. On Mackie, see L.W. Sharp, 'Charles Mackie, the First Professor of History at Edinburgh University', Scottish Historical Review, 41 (1962), pp. 23-45.

[152] Alexander Fraser Tytler, 'Lectures on Universal History 1800-1', EUL MS Dc. 6. 115; published as Elements of General History, Ancient and Modern (2 vols.; Edinburgh, 1801), 'Introduction', p.6.

[153] Frank E. Manuel, Isaac Newton: Historian (Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 10.

[154] Indeed, Mackie's notebooks show a developing interest in the programmatic statements of Voltaire concerning the need for a new kind of history, building upon Mackie's interest in the history of population and what Gudin was to call history as the *'science de calcul'*. Commonplace Book, EUL MS Dc. 8. 24, ff. 174-175.

[155] Peter Jones, 'The Scottish professoriate and the polite academy 1720-46', in, Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, (eds.), Wealth and Virtue: the shaping of political economy in the Scottish Enlightenment (Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 89-117.

submitted in 1737, two years before he attended Mackie's class.[156] The essay, *De probabilitate historica*, sought to explore the grounds upon which we could discover the truth of historical accounts. The need to establish the validity of moral evidence was, Robertson claimed, an absolutely fundamental question: without it we could rely upon no fact or event in history, not even the truth of Christianity. Robertson's solution came in the form of the concept of assent, "That which is approved by our minds". Assent functioned as a sort of natural mechanism in the mind which persuaded us of the truth of an account. Assent emerged from our contact with the texts by weighing the evidence they furnished according to their probability. Probability, according to Robertson, was able to act for all practical purposes as a replacement for absolute certainty, and to establish beyond doubt the truth of a testimony or narration. The techniques that Robertson mentioned as a mean of establishing probability involved the sort of rigorous source-criticism that Bayle, Le Clerc and Mackie had mastered: the examination of the "design of the author...whether there can be no suspicion of irregular affection, zeal, hints of secret council"; the character, prudence, judgement and skill of the author; the weighing of contrary testimonies; and the consistency of the narration.[157] Such skills would have been sharpened in Robertson by his attendance at Mackie's class. Using these criteria of judgement, Robertson displayed considerable confidence in the ability of the reader/historian to discriminate truth from falsehood, and to arrive at an approximation to mathematical certainty: "evidence of this kind differs somewhat from that which is found in strict mathematical or logical proof...Yet though none of these permit that strict proof found in mathematics, nevertheless I find them sufficiently

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[156] William Robertson, 'De Probabilitate Historica, sius evidentia moralia', in 'Class essays by students of John Stevenson 1737-1740', EUL MS Dc. 4. 54.; printed in Miscellaneous Works and Commentaries, pp. 1-7, and translated by Jeffrey Smitten, MWC, pp. 8-14.
[157] MWC, pp. 9-10.

valid...Evidence of this kind...does not seize nor compel our assent, but most certainly it wins it".[158] This certainty was guaranteed by the nature of things working upon the intellect: the mind was not rash or random in its decisions. Also, it was not in the nature of the mind to allow doubt to prey upon it and consume it with indecision. The intellect acted as our eyes in the textual world, and if it did not always dispel darkness, it informed us at least that the matters we were contemplating were inherently dark- "to which end eyes have been given to us, so that we may see external objects, made visible by the power of light, and discern their similarity and dissimilarity, congruence or difference".[159] There were obvious similarities in the approach to historical problems between Mackie and the young Robertson. Robertson shared this distrust of passions, as several of his biographers obliquely confirmed.[160] Robertson, like Mackie, showed an early appreciation of the urgent need to verify and prove historical narratives and testimonies. Both Robertson and Mackie placed a premium on critical acumen, the ability to 'read' the characters of historians and decode source texts. Both shared a sense of the importance of history as a tool for reconciling and mediating between conflicting accounts. Mackie's adherence to the history of events, moreover, was to condition the analytic structure of Robertson's narratives. The influence is most apparent in the early stages of *The History of Scotland*, in which Robertson's assertion of the impossibility of writing a narrative of early Scottish history is derived from Mackie's essay on error in history. Robertson is also likely to have been impressed by Mackie's diverse

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[158] MWC, pp. 10-11.

[159] MWC, pp. 12-13. Compare with the words of John Millar in the introduction to The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks, p. 13: "We cannot refuse our assent to such evidence, without falling into a degree of scepticism by which the credibility of all historical testimony would in a great measure be destroyed".

[160] As Thomas Somerville wrote, Robertson in his sermons "never attempted to address the passions": My Own Life and Times 1741-1814 (Edinburgh, 1861), p. 61. See also the references to Robertson as a self-conscious Stoic: Brougham, Henry (Lord), Lives of Men of Letters and Science who flourished in the Time of George III (London, 1845), I, p. 258.

historical interests, his combination of the roles of historian, classicist and antiquarian.[161] However, the detection of error was a relatively easy task compared with the construction of a narrative account, the penetration required to move into the mind of another and deduce, by a process of probability, the interior motions of the mind. Robertson's stress on probability was to be placed at the service of the creation of a full narrative of motives, rather than its destruction.[162]

The Novelistic Critique

Several commentators have noted a tendency in the eighteenth century towards the depiction of character at the expense of a narrative of actions. We have already seen how in the field of historiography Livy was being forced to give way to Tacitus as the correct model of representing character, and this involved to some extent a retreat from the idea of reading character from external action alone. This was the case in other genres also: Elizabeth Kraft has traced this process in the novel. Douglas Lane Patey has discerned a shift in characterisation in a whole range of fictional genres from a probabilistic reading of external signs towards, at the end of the century, a more intuitive process in which character was vouchsafed to the reader through glimpses, snatches, fragments. [163] Thus, character was

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[161] On the debt owed to Mackie by Robertson, see Jeffrey Smitten, 'The Shaping of Moderation: William Robertson and Arminianism', Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 22 (1992), pp. 281-300, especially pp. 284-285.

[162] On probability and history in the eighteenth century, see David Wootton, 'Proof and Persuasion in History: Narrative Irony and Faith in Gibbon's Decline and Fall', History and Theory (Theme Issue 33), pp. 77-105

[163] Elizabeth Kraft, Character and Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century Comic Fiction (Athens, Georgia, 1992), pp. 5-17. See also Kraft, 'Public Nurturance and Private Civility: The Transposition of Values in Eighteenth Century Fiction', Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture 22 (1993), pp. 181-192.

moving away from its basis in formal narrative, and new methods of divining character were being sanctioned. At the same time, characterisation was becoming ever more intricate and involved. J. Paul Hunter has noted that in the case of biography, the development towards more complex and interior representations of character was inexorable: the "desire to discover the springs of behaviour quickly became a tendency to probe the consciousness and the psyche of a subject. As the century wore on, biographers became obsessed with a desire to uncover desire and interpret motive...and the portraits became increasingly detailed and complex...chronicling movements of the mind, offering deep explanations of behaviour".[164] Although history was, as we have seen, shadowing these movements, the scepticism and scholarship which characterised it in the first half of the century limited its response to the question of characterisation. Chantal Grell has made the point, similar to that of Adam Smith, that it was the novelistic models of historical composition, such as Tacitus and Sallust, that appealed to an eighteenth century audience.[165] The historian faced the problem of how to participate legitimately in the new modes of characterisation, without forfeiting the essential identity of the historian with the truth. Certainly, the weaknesses and limitations of formal narrative were cruelly exposed by the critics, who compared them with the more open and flexible techniques of novels.

Novelists, while exploiting the authority of the historian in order to shore up their own claims to a kind of truth, also ironically sought to undermine the claims that historians made

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Douglas Lane Patey, Probability and Literary Form: Philosophic theory and literary practice in the Augustan Age (Cambridge University Press, 1984), especially pp. 242-247.

[164] J. Paul Hunter, Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth Century English Fiction (New York, 1990), p. 346.

[165] Chantal Grell, Le Dix-huitième siècle et l'antiquité en France 1680-1789 (Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 331; Oxford, 1995), pp. 992-999.

to possess a special relationship with the truth, and especially their ability to reveal characters. Samuel Richardson contrasted the affective nature of novelistic accounts of character with that of historians:

> ...the several Passions of the Mind must, of course, be more affectingly described, & Nature may be traced in her undisguised Inclinations with much more propriety and Exactness, than can possibly be found in a Detail of Actions long past, which are never recollected with the same Affections, Hopes and Dreads, with which they were felt when they occurred.[166]

The advantage of these modern forms of depicting character over those of history was that they were able to represent characters at once fictional and 'domestic'. As Mary Collyer argued, the usefulness of a history of "human life and manners" lay in its ability to instruct and improve the mind, to enable us to "form a true estimate of human nature", and thus to shape what ought to be our conduct in "every similar instance". Clearly the utility of history was severely limited by the restriction of the scene of action in "exalted and publick life, among *deep politicians* and *martial heroes*" where few readers would be able to "the reduce the example into practice". In an effort, therefore, to restore exemplarity to history, the history written and the characters surveyed must be "reduced to our own level, and applicable to our real circumstances in life":

> ...a history in familiar and common life, is, in point of real usefulness, preferable to every other...For even the *statesman* and *general* (in which particular views mankind

are commonly represented in history) cannot be said to form a complete character, without attending to the offices and duties of private life.

Novels took on that role: offering, in the language of Tacitean narrative, to expose "the secret springs and movements that actuate" the human heart. [167] Just as the business of history was integrally concerned with "the displaying so many various Characters, and the diving into the Motives of those great Mens Actions" in order to reveal the "Springs and Wheels of a mighty commonwealth", so the novel sought to fulfil the same function on a smaller, domestic scale.[168]

The recognition that the characters given in histories were unrepresentative and incomplete left the claim that histories offered an insight into human nature and the operations of the passions, the springs of action, looking somewhat tarnished. History's superiority lay in its

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[166] Samuel Richardson, 'Introduction' to Pamela (Augustan Reprint Society no.48; Los Angeles, 1954), p. vii.

[167] Mary Collyer, Preface to Marivaux, The Virtuous Orphan, or, The Life of Marianne (4 vols., 2nd edition, London, 1743), I, pp. iii-x. Sarah Fielding made the same point, drawing attention to the close parallel between histories and novels, and their essential difference: "I really think the penetrating into the Motives that actuate the persons in a private Family, of much more general use to be known, than those concerning the Management of any Kingdom or Empire whatsoever". Sarah Fielding, Remarks on *Clarissa* (Augustan Reprint Society no. 231-232; Los Angeles, 1985), pp. 5-7.

[168] Fielding, Ibid. The novel shared with history an aversion to idealisation, and an adherence to the true and probable: "As this Sort of Writing was intended as a Contrast to those in which the Reader was even to suppose all the Characters ideal, and every Circumstance quite imaginary, 'twas thought necessary, to give it a greater Air of truth, to entitle it *an* History": An Essay on the new Species of Writing Founded by Mr Fielding (Augustan Reprint Society no. 95; Los Angeles, 1962), p. 18. On the relationship between the novel and forms of history, see Michael McKeon, The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740 (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), esp. pp. 90-117. Lennard J. Davis, Factual Fictions: the Origins of the English Novel (Columbia University Press, 1983).

claim to the truth, but the nature of history's truth came under rhetorical attack from partisans of the novel, such as Diderot in his *Éloge de Richardson*:

> O Richardson! j'oserai dire que l'histoire la plus vraie est pleine de mensonges, et que ton roman est plein de vérités... l'histoire attribue à quelques individus ce qu'ils n'ont ni dit, ni fait; tout ce que tu attribues à l'homme, il l'a dit et fait: l'histoire n'embrasse qu'un portion de la durée, qu'un point de la surface du globe; tu as embrasse tous les lieux et tous les temps. Le coeur humain, qui a été, est et sera toujours le meme, est le modèle d'après lequel tu copies...j'oserai dire que souvent l'histoire est un mauvais roman; et que le roman, comme tu l'as fait, est une bonne histoire. [169]

Both novelists and historians used the same techniques of probability, but the novelist was capable of adapting his to every circumstance, to the real conditions of life. As Richardson had shown, the novelist was capable of confronting the reader with the character directly, and this had unsettling but useful implications.[170] History, by contrast, was caught between its strict regard to truth, and the bizarre and unreal quality of its subject matter. Its externality was increasingly regarded as a problem which hindered its access to character, and more importantly its ability to paint characters in their fullness.[171]

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[169] Denis Diderot, 'Éloge de Richardson', in Oeuvres Aesthétiques (ed. P. Vernière; Paris, 1959) , pp. 39-40.

[170] T. Keymer, Richardson's Clarissa and the Eighteenth Century Reader (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[171] Nonetheless, the academic response to the novel as a form was conservative and often hostile: Paul G. Bator, 'Rhetoric and the Novel in the Eighteenth-Century British University Curriculum', Eighteenth-Century Studies 30 (1996-7), pp. 173-195.

As the force of scepticism came to strip history of its more overtly fictional elements, and came to render history a less idealistic and celebratory medium for the teaching of moral truths, so critics such as Joseph Addison came to see it as less effective than the fictional genres for the representation of the purity of virtue. History was not always able to guarantee the victory of virtue, or to ensure the adequate measure of praise and blame, and the more 'true' it was compelled to be, the more mixed and equivocal its characters were likely to be.[172] For this reason, history was likely to be ambiguous in its moral effect. Colleagues of Addison, such as Eustace Budgell, might claim that history was in essence a form of epic poetry, but increasingly this was an untenable stance, and the poetic functions of historical writing were increasingly devolved upon other forms of writing.[173] While, as we have seen, the strength of historical characterisation was seen to lie in its truth and complexity, critics such as Samuel Johnson saw it as inherently limited and in essence facile, failing to provide satisfactory explanations:

> He has only the actions and designs of men like himself to conceive and to relate; he is not to form, but copy characters, and therefore he is not blamed for the inconsistency of statesmen, the injustice of tyrants, or the cowardice of commanders...the manners and actions of his personages are already fixed. [174]

Its mimetic nature, even allowing that such mimesis was possible, shut history out from the creative springs and ordering facility of fictional genres. The dubious tendency of historical

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[172] Joseph Addison, 'The Tatler' no. 117 (Jan 1710), BE, 3. Compare with Gibbon's pronouncement on the difference between the emperors of Rome, saved from oblivion by their "unparalleled vices", and the "mixed and doubtful characters of modern history": The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (3 vols.; ed. David Womersley; Harmondsworth, 1994), p. 104.

narrative was associated with its never-ending rehearsal of the same old themes of injustice, cowardice, criminality. This made many, not only moralists such as Johnson, but also rigorous scholars, begin to doubt the efficacy and utility of historical narrative. Johnson was to make the point that history was shut out from the domain of private life, and so the historian's access to the springs of character was necessarily circumscribed. Indeed, the main flaw in the biographers of the age, Johnson felt, was their unnecessary aping of the manner and method of historians. By attempting to turn a life into a historical narrative, biographers neglected the 'invisible circumstances' which truly explained a character. Thus, it would be possible to gain more knowledge of character by talking to a man's servant than by a 'studied narrative'.[175]

The more formal and 'historical' a narrative, the less access it would have to character: this was because of a sense that historical narrative was too dignified and pompous to descend into the secrets of private life, and in any case too conventionalised and general to grasp them adequately. The language of characterisation was too formulaic. Both William Craig and Adam Smith made this crucial point concerning flaws in the language of motivation employed in eighteenth century narratives. The chief problem for historians lay in slipping into a meaningless generality, as Craig emphasised: "An author who gives the internal qualities of the character, should guard against being too general":

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[173] The Guardian no.25 (April 1713), BE, 16. John F. Tinkler, 'Humanist History and the English Novel in the Eighteenth Century', Studies in Philology 85 (1988), pp. 510- 537.
[174] Samuel Johnson, 'The Rambler', No. 122 (May 1751), BE 21, pp. 86-89.
[175] Rambler No. 60, Oct 1750, BE 21, pp. 32-36. On Johnson's attitude towards history, see J. Vance 'Johnson and Hume: Of Like Historical Minds', Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 15 (1986), pp. 241-257; J. Vance, Samuel Johnson and the Sense of History (University of Georgia Press, 1984).

> Some of our most celebrated historians have committed errors of the first sort; when, at the end of a reign, or at the exit of a hero, they draw the character of the king, or great man, and tell the readers that the person they are taking leave of, was *brave, generous, just, humane*; or the tyrant they have been declaiming against, was *cruel, haughty, jealous, deceitful*; these general qualities are so little distinguishable, that they may be applied, almost, to any very good, or very bad man in the history.[176]

This generality vitiated the purpose of history, which was to locate the character firmly in concrete actuality. This is revealing: the meaningless nature of the terms used to describe the internal qualities of characters prevented history from fulfilling its function as the instructor of the "principles of the human mind" and the "human heart". Smith, again applying the criterion for describing characters to historians, wrote that "The great Fault that we are apt to fall into in the description of the characters is the making them so Generall that they Exhibit no Idea at all". The general descriptors of, for instance, courage were capable of a great deal of variation: "Cromwell and Montrose who lived in the same period were I believe of equal military skill, but the open boldness of the one and the suspicious designing temper of the other sufficiently distinguished them. Men differ not so much in the degrees of virtue and wisdom as in the peculiar Tinges which these may receive from the other Ingredients of their Character".[177] If character was primarily a question of 'tincture' then characters needed to be placed very closely under the microscope: distinctions needed to be drawn, qualifications made, precise definitions arrived at. By contrast, Craig pointed to the achievements of the superior novelists, Richardson and Fielding, in portraying character with exactitude from every angle and perspective. The historian needed to find a means of achieving this

[176] 'The Mirror' no. 31 (May 1779), BE 45, pp. 154-158.

perspective, and a way of reconciling the austerity of the new scholarship with the conjectural claims to penetration which the novelist was rapidly annexing.

The Philosophical Critique

Theoretical history at its most extreme attempted to deny the validity of historical narrative altogether. Those *philosophes* influenced by Descartes, such as d'Alembert, felt that history, incapable of achieving scientific certainty, was a lesser form of knowledge. Indeed, the form of the narrative was involved in the same criticism which had been previously levelled at chronicles and registers: that it merely recited the surface appearance of events, and failed to penetrate beneath them to discover their true causes. This reflected a radically different view of where the causes for events lay. Whereas narrative historians had focused on the specific event and the individual's motive and character, theoretical historians claimed that this constriction of viewpoint distorted the history. It prevented the historian from discovering the underlying principles which explained the diversity of manners, customs and social institutions. It frustrated history's main purpose of providing instruction for the reader, since from a particular narrative and the assessment of individual character only local and uncertain lessons could be gleaned. The uncertainty surrounding the evaluation of the individual was a crucial insight of Montesquieu, who asserted that knowledge was more sure and certain in the case of aggregations of people than in the case of individuals:

> Ces causes deviennent moins arbitraires à mesure qu'elles ont un effet plus général. Ainsi nous scavons mieux ce qui donne un certain caractère à une nation, que ce qui

[177] Smith, LRBL, Lecture 15, pp. 78-79.

> donne un certain esprit à un particulier; ce qui modifie un sexe, que ce qui affecte un homme; ce qui forme le génie des sociétés qui ont embrassé un genre de vie, que celui d'une seule personne. [178]

Increasingly the sense that the individual was an unstable element in the history created a determination to shift the ground of history away from this fragile ground which was incapable of providing the degree of regularity and predictability required in order to formulate general laws concerning the behaviour of men and the ordering of societies. As Hume put it, "What depends upon a few persons is, in a great measure, to be ascribed to chance, or secret and unknown causes: What arises from a great number, may often be accounted for by determinate and known causes".[179] Such secret and unknown causes were too 'delicate and refined' to be able to trace in their minuteness of detail and impossible to reduce to general and regular maxims. Individuals were random and fundamentally unknowable: John Millar likened them and their outcomes to the throws of a die, "proceeding from no fixed causes that are capable of being ascertained". [180]

Without an insight into general causes, history became the prisoner of accidental or exceptional causes, invoking either individual agency, divine interposition or the random interventions of fortune as explanations for events. These causes were merely appearances, the product of the narrative's adherence to the surface flow of motives and events. As

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[178] Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron Montesquieu, 'Essai sur les causes qui peuvent affecter les esprits & les caractères', Oeuvres Complètes de Montesquieu , vol. III (ed. André Masson; Paris, 1955), p. 398. On Montesquieu's attitude towards history, see David Carrithers, 'Montesquieu's Philosophy of History', Journal of the History of Ideas 47 (1986), pp. 61-80.

[179] David Hume, 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences', Essays Moral, Political and Literary, (ed. Eugene F. Miller; Indianapolis, 1985), p. 111.

[180] John Millar, The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks , Introduction, p. 5.

Gibbon said, in outlining the duties of the truly 'philosophic' historian, "the theory of general causes would form a philosophic history of mankind. He would show us their dominion over the grandeur and fall of empires, borrowing successively the appearance of fortune, prudence, courage and weakness; acting without the concurrence of particular causes, and sometimes triumphing over them".[181] Narrative had proved incapable of encompassing these slow-acting and invisible principles, because it tended, as James Dunbar pointed out, to ascribe effects to the most *visible* causes rather than to those which were 'more remote from sight'. This was because the imagination was apt to exaggerate the influence of those factors which it readily perceived.[182] Hume echoed this concern in his discussion of religion: the salutary, beneficial uses of religion are obscured by conventional history: "its operations, tho' infinitely valuable, are secret and silent; and seldom come under the Cognizance of History"; only fanaticism "distinguishes itself on the open Theatre of the World".[183] The narrative failed to explain what Millar had called the "great differences in the manners and customs of mankind", the 'amazing diversity' in laws and rules of conduct observed among different nations and tribes of mankind.[184] The narrative focus on individuals prevented this diversity from being incorporated into the texture of the narrative, except at a peripheral and digressive level. Manners might be described, customs mentioned, but they were in a sense exiled outside the structure of the narrative, and so were treated

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[181] Edward Gibbon, 'Essay on the Study of Literature', Miscellaneous Works with Memoirs of his Life and Writings (ed. John Lord Sheffield, 1837), p. 658.
[182] James Dunbar, Essays on the History of Mankind in Rude and Cultivated Ages (London, 1781), pp. 161-162.
[183] Quoted in Karen O'Brien, Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan history from Voltaire to Gibbon (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 73. It was perhaps the 'theatrical' concept of history that caused the silent and insensible operations of human nature and society to be obscured.
[184] Millar, Ibid., p. 10, p. 1.

cursorily.[185] Narrative history was too unitary, and incapable of synthesis or systematisation: the necessity to follow the track of time and the flow of cause and effect did not allow historians the space to engage in generalisation, except in the form of sententious maxims.

The notion that events were of themselves instructive because they enlarged the store of experience was also treated increasingly with scepticism. Such accounts tended to be too similar, too *uniform*, thus implying that the nature of the events themselves- the transactions of war, diplomacy and statecraft- ultimately lacked variety, instructive value or interest. They tended to reveal merely what was already too widely known and acted upon: that human action was reducible to the operation of selfish interest or wayward passions. The humanist narrative, with all of its tricks of ornamentation and rhetoric, was considered by some critics in itself to be tedious, 'minute' and repetitive, the invocation of causes, effects and motives no less than the recital of events themselves. The judicious reader was wearied and disgusted not only by the *minutiae* of detail, but also by the relentless movement of the narrative, both the visible motion of the events and the invisible flow of motives. The combination of detail and movement, while supposed to engage the reader's passions, prevented the reader from discerning the unity of events or the true causes of them. While its value as an instrument of instruction and pleasure was placed in doubt, the morality of narrative history was also brought into question, since it tended to resolve itself into the recital of the 'crimes and follies' of mankind: "un tissu de barbarie et d'horreur", as Friedrich-Melchior Grimm characterised it.[186] Voltaire condemned explicitly what he termed the 'theatrical' concept of

[185] In a sense, this was the case also with an avowedly philosophical narrative such as Hume's *History of England*, as Leo Braudy has pointed out: Braudy, Ibid., p. 35.
[186] Friedrich-Melchior Grimm, Mémoires Historiques, Littéraires et Anecdotiques, ou Correspondance Philosophique et Critique 1753-69 (London, 1814), I, April 1757, pp. 349-351. Gibbon's irony in The

history: "En effet, l'histoire n'est que le tableau des crimes et des malheurs. La foule des hommes innocent et paisibles disparait toujours sur ces vaste theatres. Les personnages ne sont que des ambitieux pervers".[187] Narrative falsified history by failing to widen its perspective, and in doing so gave a degraded picture of human nature. As Robert Henry asserted: "Can we form just ideas of the characters and circumstances of our ancestors, by viewing them only in the flames of civil and religious discord...without ever attending to their conduct and condition, in the more permanent and peaceful scenes of social life?"[188] This condemnation of theatrical history was allied to the need for history to recover not only meaning but a moral purpose. The recital of crimes and follies was felt to be complicit with them, and it was no longer enough for the historian to condemn them, but also to show that they were not the real principles of history.[189]

The History of Manners

Fundamentally, the narrative of political events suffered from a failure of perspective: the historian had buried himself in a chaos of facts, which prevented him from recurring to principles. It was also a failure of penetration, a lack of insight into the causes of events and appearances, causes which lay behind, above or beneath the level of the narrative. Without such penetration, the historian and his reader would remained perplexed, without a means of

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History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (3 vols.; ed. David Womersley; Harmondsworth, 1994), I, p. 102, is palpable: "Antoninus diffused order and tranquillity over the greatest part of the earth. His reign is marked by the rare advantage of furnishing very few materials for history; which is, indeed, little more than the register of crimes , follies, and misfortunes of mankind".

[187] Quoted from Voltaire's 'L'Ingénu' in Serge Rivière, 'Voltaire's concept of dramatic history in *Le siècle de Louis XIV*', Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 284 (1991), pp. 179-198.

[188] Robert Henry, History of Great Britain, Written Upon a New Plan (6th edition; London, 1823), I, p. xxxiv

unlocking the rationale behind diverse customs and the conduct of men. The apparently natural sequence of events was perhaps, therefore, entirely misleading and, at best, superficial. As Gibbon complained of Mably, he attributed "more consequences to the particular characters of men, often ill drawn, than to the general manners, character, and situation of nations".[190] Thus, Gibbon linked the factual inaccuracy and rhetorical ineptitude of such accounts, with the essential irrelevance of the exercise. 'Philosophical' history was in part an answer to this problem. What was required was a new language of character, in which character would refer to the larger and more stable entities of nations and societies. John Logan, in the introduction to his series of lectures published as *Elements of the Philosophy of History* in 1781, attributed the inadequacy of previous historical accounts to a failure to understand and depict the character of society as a cultural whole: "History from want of attention to this principle often degenerated into the panegyric of single men, & the worship of names", and too often attributed change to the 'visionary system' of a lawgiver rather than to the movement of the whole society.[191] The basic analogy posited between these two meanings of the term character meant that the same techniques, the same claims of the historian, could be used at both the micro and macro level. Theoretical history, despite its endeavour to change the concerns of historical writing, retained the concept and language of character at the centre of its analysis. The continuity of the terms 'character', 'painting' and 'portrait' connected by analogy this new endeavour with older forms of historiography, and with the ancient application of eloquence and forensic rhetoric to the writing of history. The figure of 'character' was used by Montesquieu and Voltaire to enclose a certain age or

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[189] Grimm, Mémoires, I, p. 346: Voltaire inculcates "les principes de justice, d'équité, de compassion et de bienfaisance; de nous éloigner de toute violence...d'anéantir cet esprit intolérant".
[190] Edward Gibbon, 'Extracts from the Journal', 17th November 1762, Miscellaneous Works with Memoirs of his Life and Writings (ed. John Lord Sheffield, 1837), p. 461.

period, and indeed functioned as a replacement for a detailed narrative of its affairs. Narrative, far from being an autonomous recreation of events, was assumed by many theoretical historians to be subservient to the identification of the manners of the age. That is to say, it was the purpose of narrative to reveal and disclose manners, and the historian reserved the right to foreground certain events, and omit others, to indulge in lengthy digressions and dissertations, rather than produce a connected and unified narrative. Events, actions and the characters of individuals were important only insofar as they furnished insights into the unique and profoundly distinct nature of the age or society of which they formed a part. The characters of individuals were therefore contextual, measured against the age, products of it, and the emphasis was often placed on their singularity, their embodiment of manners which were different from the modern. Theoretical history was believed to be a means of supplying the deficiencies of narrative history: it had the relationship with all other forms of history that mature narrative had previously been supposed to have with primitive annals. That is, it had at the centre of its project the aim of illuminating the invisible causes of history.

The project of writing a history of manners was strongly related to the construction of a science of man, which would open up the study of man to the techniques of natural science.[192] As Montesquieu had written in his most overtly historical work, the

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[191] John Logan, Elements of the Philosophy of History (Edinburgh, 1781), p. 14.

[192] Judith N. Shklar, Montesquieu (Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 10-11. As Judith Shklar has shown, Montesquieu used the language and resources of natural science in order to explain and account for human institutions. His aim was to discover the natural and usual causes of human phenomena, and to draw from his observations the laws which governed the formation of laws, polities and manners. His work was intended, therefore, to form the foundations of a natural science of man.

Considerations, "it is not chance that rules the world...There are general causes, moral and physical...All accidents are controlled by these causes".[193] It seemed that, in the discovery of general causes, both the essential meaning and the solidity of history had been reasserted. Yet of course this appeared to dictate a different form for historical knowledge, a determination to avoid merely reciting the visible effluvia of historical phenomena, the contingent events and characters that had made up history that seemed now to be irrelevant. Montesquieu's *Considerations* offered a model of a new form of history, although not without its problems. Firstly, it was a history stripped of a particular, connected narrative reconstruction of events which, he assumed, would be sufficiently well known to his audience, and which if entered into would cloud and obscure the themes of Montesquieu's analysis. It follows the history of Rome chronologically, but in the form of a series of disconnected reflections upon the state of the empire in every age. The *Considerations* resembles nothing so much as the extracted reflections of a historian, removed from their narrative context, and presented as a separate work. In a sense, Montesquieu was not and did not seek to be a historian.[194] Yet the *Considerations* was clearly intended to be a key to the history of Rome, and perhaps in understanding history as a process it was more important than a narration of the events themselves. As Montesquieu admonished the reader, in discussing the reasons for the expansion of Rome: "This calls for reflection; otherwise, we would see events without understanding them, and, by not being aware of the difference in situations, would believe that the men we read about in ancient history are of another breed

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[193] Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and their Decline (trans. David Lowenthal; New York, 1965), p. 169.

[194] Although, as David Lowenthal points out, he cast his *Considerations* in the form of a history, the work itself does not seem to require this structure; Introduction to Montesquieu, Considerations , p. 17.

than ourselves".[195] The fallacy of historical narrative was that too often it sought, by artificially transporting the reader into the position of the historical actor, a false familiarity and identification of the reader with those events. In doing so, it ironically prevented the readers from approaching those events with an adequate context, and so led them into crucial misjudgements. In rejecting the conventionalities of narrative history, Montesquieu freed himself to draw out the hidden, inner meanings behind the events. This he did through the close monitoring of the 'general spirit' and mores of the Romans, an exercise which involved the foregrounding of anecdotes, observations, and apparently casual references which in a narrative would be regarded as digressive and therefore extraneous to the narrative structure. If it was not narrative, it aimed at least to be inclusive: "I cannot overlook anything that serves to reveal the genius of the Roman people". By contrast, the unique but local entanglements of events could more easily be dispensed with, Montesquieu adopting the stance of the morally scrupulous but pained philosopher who cannot go through the painful task of the historian: "I beg permission to avert my eyes from the horrors of the wars of Marius and Sulla. Their appalling history is found in Appian".[196] It was a narrative that consisted only of causes and effects, of the hidden machinery of history, and the choice of what was relevant and necessary to be included in the history was left to the historian himself. By shifting the criteria for inclusion of his history from the tracing of public events to the reading of *esprit*, *moeurs* and the nature of government, Montesquieu's work resembled a dissertation on manners and character. The latter part of the work is largely in the form of assessments of various emperors: this was inevitable in a monarchy, but Montesquieu's reflections focused on them largely in order to assess how far they revealed

[195] Ibid., p. 39
[196] Ibid., p. 101.

the character of the Romans as a whole. Increasingly, however, Montesquieu observed that secrecy became the chief characteristic of the Romans as the empire developed. It was in the actions of the people at large that the mystery attending character could be stripped away: "...for the whole body of the people does not pretend, flatter or dissimulate".[197]

Montesquieu's work was characterised by a keen sense of the unpredictability of human actions and diversity of behaviour, and a corresponding desire to find the general ordering principles underlying this apparent chaos. By relating all 'accidents' to general and scientifically grounded causes, the work of Montesquieu optimistically promised to illuminate the dark corners of history, and indeed to eliminate chance and fiction from historical explanation. His principal work, *De l'Ésprit des lois*, published in 1748, attempted to place the study of law and politics upon a more scientific footing, by reducing the bewildering variety of circumstances and appearances to its first principles. This he did through the creation of a typology of governments based upon the discovery of the internal principles which animated them. In this way, Montesquieu achieved a rare perspective on events, a broad and comprehensive comparative approach which could range wide and embrace the laws and institutions of China and India, with a systematic order and unity which made all conform with his founding principles. This was not narrative order: the connections and links established were neither related nor received narratively, but relied on Montesquieu's power of observation and insight. Montesquieu used the concept of *esprit générale* as the principal ordering tool for his analysis of the typology of laws, to denote the collective 'spirit' or 'character' of a society, which in part determined the nature of its laws, and which was the product of a variety of physical and moral causes. This term *ésprit* was

[197] Ibid., p. 133.

flexible, but highly suggestive: it conveyed a sense of the interiority of the social or cultural system to which it was applied, its soul or mind. The connection of each of his forms of government with a ruling passion, honour, fear, or liberty, cemented this analogy between the political-social body and the physical body of the individual. Montesquieu's interest in physiology, and in physical causes, made this analogy all the more natural and persuasive for him. Montesquieu attempted to define each mode of social expression according to its animating principle, its motivating passion; and then to discriminate in each society which he scrutinised the signs of these hidden principles, which would lead to a higher unity. The formation of this 'collective spirit' of a nation or group was at the heart of Montesquieu's analysis, yet it remained uncertain in its operation, particularly in its relationship with the individual spirits of which it was composed. Montesquieu did not therefore provide a clear path for the aspiring philosophic historian: there were many contradictions in his work, especially in the relationship between particular and general causes, and physical and moral causes. There was much left for others to dispute, especially Montesquieu's determinism and materialism.[198]

With all of his attachment to methodological collectivism, Montesquieu remained a Tacitean in both style and form. His commitment to the discrimination of the mechanics of individual character can be glimpsed in the fragments of parallel characters of princes that he wrote, more Tacitean than Plutarchan, and entitled *Réflexions sur le caractère de quelques princes*

[198] On Montesquieu and determinism, see Carrithers, Ibid., pp. 71-77; Shklar, Ibid., p. 102: Shklar argues that Montesquieu lacked a coherent theory of psychological development. For Hume's demolition of Montesquieu's climatic determinism, see 'Of National Characters', EMPL, pp. 197-215.

et sur quelques événements de leur vie.[199] These *Réflexions* took the form of neither formal 'characters', nor biographies, but were rather the occasions for maxims on the nature of political behaviour and motivation in the manner of Guicciardini's *Ricordi*, the distilled essence of unwritten historical narratives. Yet they serve to show the continuing interest of a social thinker such as Montesquieu in the importance of the correct assessment of the internal motives of specific princes and statesmen, despite his sceptical reservations concerning the possibility of recovering their characters in their entirety.[200] The *Réflexions* sought to combat the lazy and vague generalisations that surrounded historical characterisation, and which Smith and Craig identified as denuding the narrative of meaning. His use of a parallel scheme of comparison of characters who appeared similar in their general traits and qualities, such as Tiberius with Louis XI and Philip II, Charles XII of Sweden with Charles the Rash of Burgundy, the duc de Mayenne and Cromwell, was intended to show the need for clear and precise distinctions to be made in the language used in describing political qualities. Each character served to bring the precise *mélange* of qualities of the other into focus, and enabled a more accurate understanding of the variable and contingent nature of generalities such as prudence, ambition and courage. Thus, although Charles XII and Charles the Rash possessed "[la]même courage, même suffisance, même ambition, même témérité, mêmes succès, mêmes malheurs, & même fin", it was only when the lives of the two princes were read closely that the essential distinction between the two was recognised: that Charles of Burgundy was "un personnage original, & l'autre, une

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[199] Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. III (ed. André Masson, Paris, 1955), pp. 537-551.

[200] For instance, on Cromwell: "Les grands hommes vont à leur but par une route; Cromwel y alla par tous les chemins. On peut, avec de la pénétration, découvrir la chaine des desseins des autres; cela fut impossible avec celui-ci. Il alla contradiction en contradiction..." Ibid., p. 544.

mauvaise copie d'Alexander".[201] In using Tiberius as the template with which all of the modern princes were compared, Montesquieu acknowledged the centrality of Tacitus as the founder of modern political history, and perhaps also sought to reveal the extent to which modern historians were too apt to apply the features of Tiberius directly to analogous (or not so analogous) modern characters.[202] Thus, the aim of his *Réflexions* is to make distinctions: by placing characters separated in time and place in direct relationship to each other, yanking them from their narrative context, Montesquieu sought to make clearer the minute differences between them that narrative conventions, with their use of the same figures of description, distorted. This comparative and juxtapositional method clarified the precise differences beneath the formal similarities.[203] Ultimately, however, Montesquieu implied, it was necessary for the reader to refer to the narrative of events in order to comprehend fully the character of the princes. It is by close attendance to the nature of the events in which Philip II was entangled, and his defective responses to them, that the differences between him and Tiberius, outwardly so minimal, can be truly appreciated. Montesquieu strips away the appearance of prudence and sagacity in which Philip's silence and obscurity shrouded him:

> ...il porta le même esprit dans tous les évènemens de sa vie & ne se plia jamais aux évènemens...Il avoit de la lenteur, & non pas de la prudence; le masque de la politique, et non pas la science des évènemens; l'apparence de la sagesse même...[204]

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[201] Ibid., p. 538.
[202] An absurd example of this tendency can be seen in Gilbert Burnet's comparison of Charles II to Tiberius: History of His Own Time (ed. Thomas Stackhouse; London, 1986), p. 220.
[203] Whereas, with the comparative analysis of the laws and customs of societies, the aim was to find the common links beneath a picture of bewildering diversity.

It is necessary therefore to look at the character in close conjunction with the events if the precise mix of qualities is to be understood. This perception was sharpened by Montesquieu's sense of the variability and changeability of events in modern Europe, especially in the sixteenth century, when the entire concept of interest was undergoing a series of rapid revolutions. In writing of Paul III, he drew attention to the necessity of understanding this context in order to appreciate the character of that pope:

> Enfin, on étoit forcé à chaque instant de changer de conduite avec des princes qui varioient toujours, & d'abandonner tous les anciens plans, dans un temps où tous les états d'Europe avoient pris de nouveaux intérêts.[205]

Overall, the *Réflexions*, while apparently repudiating narrative, depends entirely upon an (absent) narrative context for its judgements. Montesquieu's sense of the essential variability of assessments of individual characters, and of the nature of their motivations, in the specific world of modern politics, restores to narrative the importance which in his theoretical pronouncements he denied it. However, exercises such as the *Réflexions* are necessary in order to jolt readers out of their narrative complacency, and the terrible tendency of narrative conventions to reduce all to a deadening similitude.

The development of a history of 'manners' in the eighteenth century was very much influenced by the pioneering work of Montesquieu, but it was widely considered to be Voltaire who gave it a recognisable historical form, and it was around him that much of the debate concerning the nature of philosophical history revolved. Voltaire's first historical

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[204] Ibid., pp. 539-541.

work had been a biography of Charles XII of Sweden, an ironic epic dominated by the figure of Charles as a frustrated and ultimately defeated quasi-heroic figure.[206] Charles XII was in many ways an unusual work, but it did not integrate to any extent the history of manners into its structure. Nonetheless, Voltaire had expressed some dissatisfaction with the limitations of the heroic-tragic model of history that he was employing. Thus he, like Montesquieu, expressed his sense of the limitations that a description and analysis of the qualities of individuals afforded: "On dit d'un homme: il était brave un tel jour; il faudrait dire, en parlant d'une nation: Elle paraissent telle sous un tel gouvernement et une telle année".[207] The similarity of the two tasks was striking, and the analogies in the mutability of both nations and men apparent, but at least the latter held out the possibility of explanation, in terms of the principles of government. In Voltaire's next historical work, the seminal *Siècle de Louis XIV*, Voltaire declared his detachment from the traditional vision of history as a narrative of the details of political revolutions. Rather, his purpose was to write what he termed a "history of the manners of men":

> The aim of this history is to depict the chief characteristics of such revolutions, clear away the innumerable small events that obscure the great ones, and, finally, if possible, to depict the spirit that informed them.[208]

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[205] Ibid., p. 542.
[206] See J.H. Brumfitt, Voltaire: Historian (Oxford University Press, 1958); Serge Rivière, 'Voltaire's concept of dramatic history in *Le siècle de Louis XIV*', Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 284 (1991), pp. 179-198: Rivière argues that Voltaire's Charles XII was a diffuse recit, containing within itself 'superfluous digressions' and 'novelesque elements'.
[207] Voltaire, Histoire de Charles XII, roi de suède (Paris, 1942), pp. 5-6.
[208] Voltaire, Age of Louis XIV (trans. Martyn P. Pollack, London, 1961), p. 103. See Brumfitt, pp. 46-75. Karen O'Brien, Narratives of Enlightenment, pp. 21-55.

Voltaire alternated the terms 'esprit' and 'moeurs' in his attempt to define what truly constituted the subject-matter of history: in either case, he attempted to reduce the past to its 'chief characteristics', its informing spirit or mentality. In his most mature historical work, the *Essai sur les moeurs,* Voltaire's reworking of and challenge to Bossuet's concept of universal history, the history of manners had become an attempt to write a much larger history, "l'histoire de l'ésprit humain".[209] Voltaire, himself an epic poet and dramatist, did not reject the concept of historical 'painting'. Rather, he broadened it to include the painting of manners, the construction of what Gudin de la Brenellerie, the chief defender of Voltairean history against the polemical attacks of Mably, termed the *tableau de l'humanité.*[210] Voltaire wrote at the beginning of the *Siècle* that he would fix his attention upon "that which deserves the attention of all time, which paints the spirit and the customs of men".[211] As the idea of 'manners' was naturalised into historical narrative, manners like characters came to be seen as an adornment of narrative, and a means of imparting crucial information to the reader in a non-narrative form. Thus, Voltaire's movement outside Europe and into the histories of Japan, China, and India, was carried out by constructing a series of pictures of the manners of these nations. Such a portrait was able to usurp the place of a connected narrative of the histories of these nations. Voltaire's history, in its breadth of scope and relative brevity, was of necessity highly selective in its approach to the various subjects that it covered. Again, like Montesquieu, Voltaire made the criterion of selection

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[209] See René Pompeau, 'Introduction' to François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, Essai sur les moeurs et l' ésprit des nations (Paris, 1963), pp. xvi-lxiv.

[210] Gudin de la Brenellerie, Supplement à la manière d'écrire l'histoire; ou réponse à l'ouvrage de M. l'Abbé de Mably (Paris, 1784), pp. 9-10: "C'est le grand tableau de l'humanité que vous devez peindre; vous devez le peindre, non tel qu'un poëte qui l'exagère pour le rendre plus frappant; non tel qu'un peintre qui n'offre que des surfaces, qui trompe par son coloris, qui ne présente que le côté qui plaît, & qui charme par des illusions; vous êtes le sculpteur chargé de faire la statue entière, d'offrir le modèle sous tous ses aspectes".

that which would reveal the manners, spirit, character of the society about which he wrote. As the *Monthly Review* appreciatively remarked: "The design of this ingenious work...is to exhibit a picture of mankind in different ages; it does not present us with details of battles & public calamities...but enables us to frame to ourselves a general picture of the world". This was connected to his skill at the characterisation of individuals: "Tho' he purposely avoids entering into details, he throws no inconsiderable light upon the times of which he writes, & the principal characters that appeared in them".[212] There was substance however to the complaints of hostile critics that Voltaire sought to turn history into a kind of game in which he was allowed to dictate the rules, and to which he alone held the key. Voltaire's approach, highly personal as it was, allowing for frequent and lengthy interpolations by the historian himself, and with the historian constantly assessing the behaviour of men and groups of the past by his own standards of judgement and in he light of his political and religious polemics, was open to attack. Thus, one critic objected that while the "remarks of Tacitus seem to rise from the narration; those of Voltaire often proceed from the man". Similarly, Voltaire was too fond of "characters and anecdotes that may serve to strike the Reader, he generally raises or depresses both, as best suits the point of representation he has in view".[213] Voltaire more than any other historian in the eighteenth century helped to sanction the rebirth of anecdotal history, the striking remark, the surprising but inspired remark, rather than detailed and connected description of action, as a legitimate vehicle for the characterisation of men and societies. Such anecdotes were valuable because they revealed difference, the disjunction between societies, and they jolted the reader out of the complacency of narrative conventions, with their tendency to impose similarity upon all the objects that were treated

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[211] Voltaire, Age of Louis XIV, p. 5.
[212] Monthly Review, 10 (1754), p. 197; 12 (1755), p. 462.

narratively. Thus, Grimm stated that "une rémarque sur les moeurs d'un siècle, ses coutumes et ses usages, vaut mieux que quinze dates de batailles, de naissances et de morts".[214] It was enough that Voltaire had succeeded in isolating the key events, showing "the spirit by which they were conducted, & makes us acquainted with the genius and manners of the principal persons that figured in those times of which he treats".[215] Grimm praised Voltaire's history as predominantly a history of the folly of the human mind. In this it was complained that he resembled Tacitus, a point which Grimm accepted: "Un des talens de M. de Voltaire est de très-bien saisir le caractère des personnages avec toutes ses nuances".[216]

The tendency of history to split into specialisations in the eighteenth century has been noted, and was in part the result of the growing awareness of the process of history itself as the progressive outcome of the fruits of specialisation and the division of labour. This however presented ambitious totalising structures such as the history of manners with a problem, for while it argued for the systematisation of knowledge, such histories were also increasingly fractured. Thus, philosophical history split itself into a variety of unrelated dissertations. For instance, the work of a writer such as James Dunbar, or of the hack editor John Adams, tended to attenuate the structure of the history of man into different categories. This is even the case in the work of such a distinguished member of the *literati* as Adam Ferguson, whose

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[213] Letter to the Monthly Review 17 (1757), p. 156.
[214] Friedrich-Melchior Grimm, Mémoires, I, p. 172.
[215] In a review of 'Louis XIV', Monthly Review, 7 (1752), pp. 116-117.
[216] Grimm, Ibid., p. 176.

Essay on the History of Civil Society was in danger of falling into incoherence.[217] Robert Henry's *History of Great Britain* (1771-1785) is however the clearest example of this lack of integration, since Henry himself built into the structure of his work an assumption of the fragmentation of historiography, and made this the basis of his 'new plan'.

His history was divided into conventional periods, with each period treated as a self-contained unity. Each unit was itself divided into seven parts, treating successively civil/military history; the constitution, government, and laws; religious and ecclesiastical affairs; learning; the arts; commerce; and, finally, manners. The separation of the different topics reflected the essentially different audiences that had emerged for history over the previous century. Each section could therefore be read in isolation, by lawyer, cleric, merchant, scholar, according to their own specialised interests. The unity of history as a common source of morality and instruction was thus compromised. The part of history, however, that reunited all classes and indeed the threads of all the other forms of history was the last category, the history of *manners*:

> The history of manners will probably be esteemed by many readers the most agreeable and entertaining part of any history. Those who are much amused with observing the various humours, passions, and ways of mankind in real life, or with

[217] See James Dunbar, An Essay on the History of Mankind (London, 1781); Henry Home (Lord Kames), Sketches on the History of Man (1774; edition consulted, Glasgow, 1802); Adam Ferguson, An Essay on the History of Civil Society [1767] (ed. Duncan Forbes; Edinburgh University Press, 1966). An example of this diffuse nature of organisation an be seen in a compilation work such as John Adams, Curious Thoughts on the History of Man (London, 1789). An example of a particularly badly integrated work is William Alexander, The History of Women, from the Earliest Antiquity to the Present Time (3rd edition, 1782), which was described by the *Monthly Review* as "badly arranged and poorly selected", and consisting of a series of "imperfect sketches" of the characters of American, African, and Asian women. MR 61 (July-Dec 1779), pp. 413-415.

> the just and lively representations of them on the stage, will peruse with pleasure a delineation of the manners, customs, and character of nations in their several ages, if it is faithfully drawn by the pen of the historian. For by such a delineation, a people are brought again upon the field, as they were in the successive periods of their history; and are made to pass in review before the reader, who hath thereby an opportunity of hearing their language, seeing their dress, diet and diversions; and of *contemplating* their virtues, vices, singular humours, and most remarkable customs; which cannot fail to afford him an agreeable entertainment.

Henry did not specify for whom the civil/military narrative of his history was intended: the traditional audience for the transactions of the *arcana imperii,* politicians and princes, were enjoined instead to pay particular attention to the history of manners:

> This part of history is also the most useful and interesting, especially to those who are concerned in the administration of public affairs, and the government of states and kingdoms. It is of much greater importance to princes and politicians to be intimately acquainted with the real characters, the virtues, vices, humours, and foibles of the nations which they govern.[218]

Henry's appreciation of the history of manners as a means of divining the character of the people, just as the traditional civil/military narrative had been a means of reading the characters of the great, implied a reversal of priorities. But it was a reversal within the Tacitean tradition: as Richard Tuck has shown, Tacitean historians and writers had enjoined upon the prince his need to study and understand the characters of those he governed, and

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[218] Robert Henry, History of Great Britain, II, p. 278.

this was a central task of government. It was only with the emergence of the history of manners, however, that they had a genuine opportunity to do so.[219] The exceptionally diverse and miscellaneous nature of this category of history seems to argue against its role as a unifying element in the history, yet, as Henry asserted, the other parts of his history ultimately owed their importance to the part which they played in shaping the 'character and manners' of the age. Thus, the history of religion was important because it allowed an insight into the process whereby the minds, manners, characters and actions of nations were shaped. Similarly, without an investigation of the constitutions, and the nature and spirit of the laws "it is impossible to form just ideas of the character and manners of any people".[220] Peter Hans Reill has argued that theoretical histories used an analogical mode of analysis to conceive of entities such as societies, nations and groups as 'individuals', endowed with 'characters' and 'spirits'. They used the language of Buffonian natural history in order to move *inward* and identify and 'penetrate' the internal, unseen agents of historical change: traders, travellers, craftsmen, farmers, artists who "did the real work that kept the body alive and hence were equivalent to the 'hidden' active powers in an organized body".[221] Manners lay at the basis of history, and character formed the organisational principle of manners. Indeed, without the concept of 'character', with all of the moral baggage that that implied, Henry's sections on manners would have been hopelessly miscellaneous. Miscellany was still the dominant characteristic of most attempts to compile a history of manners, and this lack of an organisational principle threatened the entire project. The irony of the history of

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[219] Richard Tuck, Philosophy and Government 1572-1651 (Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 74-75: this was a point argued by critics such as Giovanni Costa, Virgilio Malvezzi, and Ottavo Sammarco.
[220] Henry, I, p. 238.

manners was that it sought to present history as a unified system of relations, yet it could so easily break down into incoherence. This was Mably's point, writing of 'universal' histories: how could the historian maintain order and unity within a structure that sought to combine so many different particular histories?: "De ces faits morcelés & hachés je ne puis tirer aucune instruction?". Above all, the example of Robertson must serve to render us "timide et circonspecte".[222]

The Plutarchan Model

The Plutarchan mode of characterisation enjoyed an enormous vogue in the eighteenth century, and in many ways dominated its discourse of character. Plutarchan characters were among the most popular literary forms, often appropriated for satirical purposes.[223] Plutarch was particularly admired for his intrinsic moralism. Mably argued that it was in the strenuous advocacy of virtue that "*Plutarque* est peut- être le premier des historiens".[224] Plutarch offered a pattern of history that was congenial to the teaching of morality, while offering also the colours and beauties that moral pedagogy too often lacked. In Plutarchan history, not only was the larger context obscured by the dominating hero of the *Life*, but even the events

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[221] Peter Hanns Reill, 'Buffon and Historical Thought in Germany and Great Britain', in Buffon 88, p. 671; Peter Hanns Reill, 'Narration and Structure in Late Eighteenth Century Historical Thought', History and Theory 25 (1986), pp. 286-98.

[222] Gabriel Honoré Bonnot, Abbé de Mably, De la manière d'écrire l'histoire (Paris, 1784), p. 111.

[223] Robertson himself was the subject of a Plutarchan parallel 'character' written by Alexander Carlyle, comparing him with Hugh Blair: see National Library of Scotland MS. 3464. Published in Alexander Carlyle, Anecdotes and Characters of the Times (ed. James Kinsley, Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 277-282. On the genre, see Martine Watson Brownley, 'Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets* and Earlier Traditions of the Character Sketch in England', in James Engell (ed.), Johnson and His Age: Harvard English Studies 12 (Harvard University Press, 1984).

[224] Mably, pp. 48-9: it was a matter of regret for Mably that Plutarch had never traced the "tableau intéressant" of Augustus.

of his life were rearranged into what Francis Bacon termed "titles and bundles".[225] As Wilem Van de Boer has argued, Plutarch's lives were in fact 'ethical essays' rather than biographies *per se*, and therefore it was the delineation of character rather than the representation of the life that dictated what was to be included in the history. Nothing was omitted that was judged to give access to character.[226] It was this method that became one model for the 'philosophic' revelation of character, when applied to the character of an age or nation. The apparently digressive and irrelevant were connected to the notion of character in order to justify their inclusion in a history. It was felt that, just as history was no longer the retailing of purposive actions and political schemes, but rather the story of the development of society, a variety of isolated incidents, reflections and images could be gathered together in pursuit of this aim. Plutarch's own words form the basis of this claim:

> Nor is it always in the most distinguished atchievements that men's virtues or vices may be best discerned; but very often an action of small note, a short saying, or a jest, shall distinguish a person's character more than the greatest sieges, or the most important battles.[227]

Boswell had cited these words at the beginning of his *Life of Johnson*, in recognition of Johnson's own abiding interest in Plutarch, and also as a justification for the comprehensive inclusiveness of his biography. Johnson himself was a critic of the public-historical narrative

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[225] Although Bacon was referring to Suetonius: quoted in John F. Tinkler, 'The Rhetorical Method of Francis Bacon's *History of the Reign of King Henry VII*', History and Theory 26 (1987), pp. 32-52.
[226] "Plutarch's Philosophic Basis for Personal Involvement', in J.W. Eadie and Josiah Ober (eds.), The Craft of the Ancient Historian: Essays in Honour of Chester G. Starr (University Press of America, Lanham, Md, 1985), pp. 373-386.
[227] Quoted in James Boswell, Life of Johnson (ed. R.W. Chapman; Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 23-24.

revelation of character, for its externality and superficiality. As he wrote in the *Rambler,* biographers had too often, like historians, confined themselves to the exhibiting a "chronological series of actions" rather than in truly painting the "manners and behaviour of their heroes":

> ...more knowledge may be gained of a man's real character, by a short conversation with one of his servants, than from a formal and studied narrative, begun with his pedigree, and ended with his funeral.[228]

For Johnson only personal, intimate contact afforded the spectator a peak into those "invisible circumstances" that "publick occurrences omitted". The Plutarchan model permitted an entry into the private life and circumstances of the man, as Tacitus had afforded a privileged glimpse into the inner workings of his political mind. Montaigne saw both techniques as analogous, but Plutarch's dissociation from the narrative as more useful and stimulating:

> ...the man as a whole, whom it is my object to know, is more vividly and completely presented in their [historians'] works than anywhere else. I find in them the diversity of his inner qualities, in the large and in detail, also the various traits that make up his character, and the accidents that threaten them. Now those of them that write separate lives, being concerned rather more with motives than with events, more with what arises from within than with what arrives from without, suit me best of all. That is why Plutarch is my man.[229]

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[228] Ibid., pp. 24-25 (from 'The Rambler no. 60).
[229] Montaigne, Essays (trans. and ed. J. M. Cohen; Harmondsworth, 1958), pp. 168-169.

Plutarch supplied a history of motives, preponderating over events. In the eighteenth century, the history of manners appropriated this form in order to depict the manners of an age, people or social group. It was the basis of those digressive pictures of unusual and diverting circumstances, as well as of striking and singular characters, that characterises much of the history of manners, in imitation of Voltaire. In rejecting the minutiae of public affairs, historians of manners allowed themselves the freedom to bring forward any circumstance that allowed them to reflect upon 'character'. Ironically, Voltaire introduced his section of *Louis XIV* on anecdotes by berating Plutarch for his greater commitment to morality than accuracy:

> Plutarch's *Lives of Great Men* is a collection of anecdotes more entertaining than accurate; how could he have definite knowledge of the private lives of Theseus and Lycurgus? The majority of the maxims that he puts into the mouths of his characters are more noteworthy for their moral content rather than their historical truth...One is not allowed nowadays to imitate Plutarch...[230]

Yet Voltaire's commitment to anecdote, when it could be verified, although justified chiefly by the porous relationship between private and public that existed in the court of Louis XIV, and the fascination with which Louis' character was regarded, revealed the extent to which a new audience was demanding a more diverse history, and the way in which historians of manners were responding to this demand. The novelistic approach to character, its claim to represent the real truth of men and, importantly, women in ordinary situations, was a crucial

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[230] Voltaire, Age of Louis XIV , p. 255.

paradigm: Plutarch provided it with classical historical underpinning. The history of manners provided a more flexible and digressive model for the revelation of character than had the strict adherence to a narrative of high political transactions. Instead of confining character to actions, that is, to the purposive pursuit of power and glory, the imperative of revealing the character and manners of an age allowed for more latitude in the relation of striking incidents or singular events which depicted the character or spirit of the age. In this way, the history of manners allowed for a looser and less formal structure for the discovery of character. Voltaire's *Siècle de Louis XIV* revealed the extent to which trivial and private actions could be more effective in revealing character than the great actions of state, precisely because of their informality, and the absence of guile or disguise. In this way, it placed more emphasis upon the historian's selection of details than upon his mysterious power of penetration. This became a commonplace of eighteenth century writing. Robert Cullen, in an article for *The Lounger*, delineated why the typical narrative of politics was incapable of the penetration which it claimed for itself:

> The great passions which actuate men in the pursuits of life, present little diversity of features to afford any just discrimination of character. Besides, in conducting the pursuits to which these passions incite, men are apt to be upon their guard: they are restrained by the customs and opinions of the world, and, under a kind of disguise, are constantly acting an artificial part.[231]

The theatricality of historical action itself made a mockery of the claims of historians to strip away disguises: it was rather in the trivial circumstances, when the guard was down, that

[231] 'The Lounger', No. 12, April 1785, BE, 36, pp. 70-76.

character could be glimpsed, fleetingly. As Gibbon advised, "Often prefer minute traits to brilliant deeds. It is the same with an age or nation as it is with an individual man". This was the cornerstone of the Plutarchan history of manners. [232]

As Mark Salber Phillips has recently observed, the variety of genres upon which history bordered, or over which it strayed, was immense. Phillips contends that what lay at the bottom of all of these new historical projects, from conjectural history to the biography, was a preoccupation with the "structures and experiences of private life", and a "desire to explore the inward lives of individuals and the everyday life of societies". Thus, these new historical genres all challenged the "strict identification of history with public life", and created a tension with the inherited classical notions of historiography by importing into them new social and sentimental concerns. This shift in historiographical subject matter led to both a greater interest in the private, inner space of individuals, the flow of their emotions and sentiments, and a determination to investigate changes at a social and macro-historical level.[233] The Plutarchan model as a means of probing the relationship between individual character and the manners in which they were enmeshed was particularly powerful because it seemed to speak to the audience's desire for entertainment. However, for a critic such as Volney, Voltaire's so-called 'philosophical' histories were simply dramatistic and sensationalistic rewritings of conventional history, which foregrounded certain characters

[232] See Gibbon, 'Essay on the Study of Literature', Miscellaneous Works with Memoirs of his Life and Writings (ed. John Lord Sheffield, 1837), pp. 655-656.
[233] Mark Phillips, 'Reconsiderations on History and Antiquarianism: Arnaldo Momigliano and the Historiography of Eighteenth Century Britain', Journal of the History of Ideas 57 (1996), pp. 297-316: pp. 298-9: producing "a fruitful tension between the social and sentimental interests of the age, and the inherited view of history".

and events without providing a proper framework in which they could be philosophically analysed. Thus, it was pure entertainment, containing little or no historical philosophy.[234] Similarly, as a reviewer in *Blackwood's Magazine* claimed, Gibbon's history, like that of Voltaire's *Essai sur les Moeurs*, was a form of what he called 'scenical' history, in which the historian could modulate his perspective at will, swooping in and out of particular events, sometimes adopting a microscopic approach, and sometimes assuming the telescopic view. As the reviewer asserted, this was both a popular and a 'picturesque' method of presenting history. [235]

Robertson's *History of Scotland*, with its deft handling of the numerous character problems and its claim to illuminate the hidden and private experience of Mary Stuart, prompted Hume to suggest that he adhere in future to the informal Plutarchan model of history. This scheme to illumine the 'Corners of History' was urged on with more ardour by Lord Lyttelton:

> Go on, dear Sir, to enrich the English Language with more Treats of Modern History...you have talents and youth enough to undertake the agreeable and useful task of giving us all the Lives of the most Illustrious princes, who have flourished since the age of Charles V in every part of the world, and comparing them together, as Plutarch has done the most celebrated Heroes of Greece and Rome. This will diffuse yr Glory as a Writer further than any other Work: all nations will have an equal interest in it, & feel a gratitude for the stranger who takes pains to immortalize

[234] C.-F. Volney, La loi naturelle/ Leçons d'histoire (ed. Jean Gaulmier; Paris, 1980), p. 128.
[235] Blackwood's Magazine 32 (1832), pp. 786-787: this was a history based on selection.

> the virtues of those to whom he is only related by the general sympathy of sentiment and esteem...[236]

Lyttelton's proposal, like that of Hume, recognised Robertson's skill at characterisation, his 'sympathy' for characters, and his sensitivity to the nuances of character portrayal. However, it is striking that in both cases, Robertson should respond by not only rejecting flatly these suggestions, but by writing histories of a profoundly different nature from those envisaged by Hume and Lyttelton. In writing *Charles V*, Robertson exhibited his profound commitment to the public narrative of great transactions, and consequently the narrative revelation of political character, as the necessary medium for painting the manners of the age, and deliberately eschewed the developing convention that the illumination of private experience would give the reader an insight into the history of manners. In doing so, he ran the risk of frustrating the expectations of readers who regarded Voltaire's *Siecle de Louis XIV* as the principal point of reference for *Charles V*. Hume warned Robertson of this danger:

> I wish the public may not, in one particular, meet with a Disappointment in your Work: They seem to expect, that it is to be more a history of the Age of Charles V, and that the Wars and Negotiations and usual historical Transactions will fill but a small part of it. This expectation may make them less relish your very elegant Narration: However, you will have something too of what they look for.[237]

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[236] Lord Lyttelton to Robertson, 2nd March 1769: National Library of Scotland MS. 3942, f. 83.
[237] Hume to Robertson, 27th November 1768: NLS MS 3942: f. 71. Hume seems here to be expressing his own disappointment and his own expectations. In a previous letter of 1759, he had referred to Robertson's projected work as a history of the *age* of Charles V, rather than of his reign, therefore deliberately transferring a Voltairean echo into Robertson's scheme.

Dr Douglas, representing to Robertson the opinion of the clergy of London, wrote that "Some expected to find a more particular account of the revival of Letters, & of the principal Characters who made a figure in Italy in the age of Leo the 10th; others say they have been disappointed in not meeting with anecdotes of the private life of Charles".[238] *Charles V* was, rather, a history which privileged the connected narrative of public transactions above the illumination of what Hume had called the "Corners of History". The project that Hume meditated was fundamentally opposed to a narrative presentation of character: "not to enter into a Detail of the Actions, but to mark the manners of the great Personages, by domestic stories, by remarkable sayings, and by a general sketch of their Lives and Adventures". Its justification was the interest and entertainment which it would arouse in the readership, and Hume did not hesitate to urge Robertson to stoop beneath the dignity of history, "to speak more of his [Henry IV's] mistresses than his battles". This, for Hume, constituted the "Flower of Modern History", and promised more entertainment than would be possible from a narrative which would, from scruple, be obliged to cover much ground that could not please the reader.[239]

In rejecting the Plutarchan model, Robertson was also distancing himself from the model that Voltaire had given in his *Siècle de Louis XIV*. Voltaire shared with Hume and even Adam Smith a sense that the modern readership's interests and pleasures had, with the general refinement of taste, evolved away from the external history of events towards the internal history of motivation, and from representations of public life towards those of private life. In *Louis XIV*, the personality of Louis and the 'character' of his court held together the fragile

[238] Douglas to Robertson, 21st April 1769: NLS MS 3942, f. 91. Robertson expressed his fear at this possibility in a letter of 31st January 1769, f. 75.

structure of narrative, anecdote, 'secret' history, and dissertation. Voltaire justified the inclusion of the 'smallest details' of Louis' private life in three ways. Firstly, the 'great soul' of Voltaire's hero touched everything with which it was connected, and lent it lustre. Secondly, Louis was the focus of all eyes in Europe during his reign. Voltaire's curiosity concerning his life re-enacted this contemporary obsession with the man as well as the monarch. Thirdly, the centrality of the institution of the court as the cause of the revolution in taste and manners which distinguished the epoch, altered the criteria by which historians judged facts worthy of inclusion in a history. Incidents apparently trivial in themselves, the amours and intrigues of the court, were capable of exposing the causes of great changes in taste and throwing light on the prevailing manners. For Voltaire, this meant that the reader was more likely to be compelled by a narrative of the secret intrigues of the court of Augustus than the conquests of Attila and Tamerlane.[240] This was an aim that Robertson endorsed: he did not wish to enter into a minute and disgusting relation of battles any more than Voltaire; and he was committed to the revelation of motives and internal qualities. However, Robertson placed no confidence in anecdotes of private life, and sought to eliminate them from his history.[241] Rather, Robertson sought to revivify the public narrative of events by bringing it into relationship with what he termed the 'history of the human mind'.

The History of the Human Mind

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[239] Hume to Robertson, 7th April 1759: NLS MS 3942, ff. 31-33.
[240] Voltaire, Age of Louis XIV, pp. 254-255.
[241] Lord Loughborough, in a letter to Robertson, distanced Robertson from the superficial Voltairean model of historiography: "he [Voltaire] has no title to rank amongst Historians, unless you admit writers of anecdotes and epigrams at the head of which he fairly stands, into your honourable society": 25th July 1791, NLS MS 3944, ff. 77-78.

In Book IV of the *History of America* Robertson produced a definitive programmatic statement on the nature of what came to be known as 'conjectural' history:

> In order to complete the history of the human mind, and attain to a perfect knowledge of its nature and operations, we must contemplate man in all those various situations wherein he has been placed. We must follow him in his progress through the different stages of society, as he gradually advances from the infant state of civil life towards its maturity and decline. We must observe, at each period, how the faculties of his understanding unfold, we must attend to the efforts of his active powers, watch the various movements of desire and affection as they arise, and mark whither they tend, and with what ardour they are exerted. [242].

Robertson was referring to the study of the "condition and character" of the savage Americans, which he called "one of the most important as well as instructive researches which can occupy the philosopher or historian", because it facilitated a hitherto impossible return to the origins of all history.[243] The character of the American was but the first stage, a documentary fragment, of a much larger history, the meta-narrative of the history of human mentality. It was the only possible starting point for all conjectural or 'natural' histories. The professed aim of conjectural history, according to Dugald Stewart, was to trace the hidden connections that linked savage to modern man, and so to erase the 'wonder' and sense of disbelief that modern man felt in contemplating his distant ancestor.[244] The dislocation of

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[242] HA, II, p. 50.
[243] HA, II, pp. 49-50.
[244] Dugald Stewart, 'Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, LL.D.', in Collected Works of Dugald Stewart , vol. X (ed. Sir William Hamilton; Edinburgh, 1858), pp. 5-98; pp. 32-37.

modern man from the savage had continued to perplex philosophers from the discovery of America until the eighteenth century, and threatened to empty the idea of human nature of all meaning. Hume had dramatised this mutual comprehension in the famous phrase "thus all men stand staring at one another".[245] The history of the human mind emerged therefore from the philosophical debate surrounding the hypothesis of the 'state of nature' by natural law theorists in the seventeenth century, and conjectural history was explicitly designed to erase the apparent differences between the savage and the polished, to assert their identity as the same being with the same mental and emotional equipment. The progress of the human mind, almost beyond recognition, from mere sensation to the construction of vast, complicated systems of knowledge, was understood as a progressive and gradual unfolding of principles already implanted in the human frame. Yet the steps separating the savage mind from its modern counterpart were too vast to be incorporated into a single process. With the 4-stage theory, savage and polished societies were separated by four distinct stages of social organisation, a taxonomy that tended to enhance the sense of distance between savage and modern, rather than assert their essential identity. The characters of savage and modern man were mediated by two interim character types, isolated from each other in their own discrete stages.[246]

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[245] David Hume, 'The Natural History of Religion', in Hume on Religion (ed. Richard Wollheim; London, 1963), pp. 31-99: section XII. On the long process of assimilation of the American into the world-picture of western philosophy, see Anthony Pagden, The fall of natural man: The American Indian and the origins of comparative ethnology (Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[246] For a criticism of stadial history as lacking a principle of progress, see T. Carlos Jacques, 'From Savages and Barbarians to Primitives: Africa, Social Typologies, and History in Eighteenth Century French Philosophy', History and Theory (April 1997), pp. 189- 215. Karen O'Brien, Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan history from Voltaire to Gibbon (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 132-136.

Conjectural history represented the most extreme reaction against conventional forms of historical writing. While narrative and erudite histories dealt with particular documented events, and required some mechanism of verification for the actions and manners they described, conjectural history by definition concerned itself with the undocumented and unverifiable. Indeed, conjectural history was not in truth classifiable as a type of history at all. It was a form of philosophical discourse, derived from natural law theory, Newtonian scientific methodology and Lockean psychology.[247]

Nonetheless, conjectural history, in the unstable conditions of eighteenth century historiography, attached itself to historical discourse, and was crucial in extending the vision of historians beyond that sanctioned by the limits of documentary evidence. The conjectural historian concerned himself therefore not with adventitious and external events that happened to happen, but with the essential and necessary events that must have taken place within the human mind in certain circumstances and at a particular stage in its development. Conjectural history was therefore the extension of the historian's powers of penetration into more secure and certain territory, dealing not with the capricious actions of individuals, but with the regular, uniform operation of certain principles of human nature upon the human mind. The conjectural-historical method not only enabled the historian to enter territory hitherto closed to him, but provided him with the means to imagine a history of mankind in its entirety. History was therefore elevated from an account of limited and dubious events to the status of a philosophical meditation on the nature of mankind in society. In its simplicity, adherence to nature, penetration of the internal and real causes of events, and apparent

[247] Dugald Stewart classified it as a "new species of philosophic investigation", or as a "philosophical commentary on the history of laws and manners": 'Adam Smith', pp. 34-35.

irrefutability, it could be seen as the highest stage in the progress of historiography, its most abstract yet most true incarnation.

The history of the mind was also a history of society. Indeed, it was in the field of the history of language that the connections between the two projects were most apparent. Adam Smith considered that a naturalistic account of man's acquisition of language would provide "the best history of the natural progress of the human mind in forming the most important abstractions upon which all reasoning depends". Smith himself did not write this history, but his *Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages* sketched the outlines which such a history would follow, and Stewart's formulation of the characteristics of conjectural history was prompted by the shape of the *Considerations.*[248] Drawing upon the resources of Lockean psychology, the French philosopher Étienne Bonnot de Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connoisances humaines* (1746) sought to unlock through a genetic account of the acquisition of language "*l'histoire d'entendement*", and thus to provide a detailed history of the cognitive faculties of man by tracing its evolution from a primitive 'language of signs' towards greater sophistication and abstraction.[249] Bernard Mandeville, as Rüdiger Schreyer has pointed out, approached the study of the origins of language from another perspective: his desire to theorise the nature of society. Using the natural psychology of the French *moralistes* to construct a theory of society that was grounded in what E.G.

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[248] Smith to George Baird, 7th February 1763, Correspondence of Adam Smith (eds. E.C. Mossner and I.S. Ross: Indianapolis, 1987), pp. 87-88. Adam Smith, 'Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages', LRBL, pp. 203-226. Dugald Stewart, 'Adam Smith', pp. 32-34.

[249] Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, 'Essai sur l'origine des connoissances humaines', Oeuvres Philosophiques (ed. Georges Le Roy; Paris, 1947), pp. 3-118. On '*l'histoire d'entendement*' see Georges Le Roy, 'Introduction', pp. ix-xvi. Hans Aarslef, 'The Tradition of Condillac: The Problem of the Origin of Language in the Eighteenth-Century and the Debate in the Berlin Academy before Herder', in From Locke to Saussure: Essays of the Study of Language and Intellectual History

Hundert has termed 'an anatomy of the invisible part of man', Mandeville aimed to reduce the manifold appearances of society to their true and irreducible motivations in the 'ruling passion' of self-liking, rooted in a profoundly materialistic anthropology and mechanistic psychology of the passions. His naturalistic 'conjectural' history of the origins of language, derived from Lucretius, was therefore brutally reductionist, and centred on the notion of the 'savage' as an essentially animalistic creature.[250] For both Mandeville and Condillac, the acquisition of language was both an inherently social act, a product of the desire to communicate mutual needs and wants, and the first crucial stage in the march of man's understanding from primitive sensations to the development of the higher faculties. The development of man's knowledge, his understanding, seemed therefore to provide an index of his social development.

The abstract history of the mind was therefore intimately related to the developing history of social institutions. Seventeenth century natural law theory had demonstrated that crucial aspects of social behaviour were historically constituted, and best described as the result of a historical process. Samuel von Pufendorf's account of the origins of property and government had shown society in a necessary and inescapable relationship with circumstances that were subject to change and evolution.[251] As Christopher Berry has pointed

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(London, 1982), pp. 146-209. G.A. Wells, The Origin of Language: Aspects of the Discussion from Condillac to Wundt (La Salle, Illinois, 1987).

[250] Bernard Mandeville, The Fable of the Bees (ed. F.B. Kaye; Oxford University Press, 1924), especially I, pp. 186-191. F.B. Kaye, 'Mandeville on the Origin of Language', Modern Language Notes 39 (1924), pp. 136-142. Rudiger Schreyer, 'Condillac, Mandeville, and the Origin of Language', Historiographia Linguistica (1978), pp. 15-43. E.G. Hundert, The Enlightenment's Fable: Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society (Cambridge University Press, 1994), especially pp. 93-114.

[251] Samuel von Pufendorf, Of the Law of Nature and Nations in 8 Books (trans. Basil Kennet; London, 1717); On the Duty of Man and Citizen (ed. James Tully; trans. Michael Silverthorne; Cambridge University Press, 1991). Istvan Hont, 'The language of sociability and commerce: Samuel Pufendorf and the theoretical foundations of the '4-stages Theory'', in Anthony Pagden (ed.), The Languages of

out, it was the addition of the cognitive element, the stress on the development of the mind in relationship to environmental and social factors, that transformed the natural law theory of Pufendorf into conjectural history.[252] This can be seen in the causal accounts of justice given by Hume and Smith, in which by returning to the origins of society, they sought by a process of conjecture to explain the psychological process by which men came to embrace society, and the internal motivations which led men to accept property, government and the progressive division of mankind into ranks.[253] Conjectural history was ultimately a history of conjectured motivations, the aim being to explain by what internal mental process or chain of reasoning men came to submit to society and government, establish and accept justice, and gradually acquire and develop new skills and ways of thinking, perceiving and behaving. Its events were all suppositious and imagined, derived from assumptions concerning the relationship between human nature and circumstance, and while the process which it described was invisible, silent and internal, its claims were securely founded upon a close and minute observation of human nature.[254] Conjectural history in its most abstract form, such as in Smith's *History of Astronomy* or Hume's *Natural History of Religion* was a history of the diverse responses of certain principles implanted in the mind, such as fear and

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Political Theory in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 253-276. Knud Haakonssen, The Science of a Legislator: the Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith (Cambridge University Press, 1981); Duncan Forbes, Hume's Philosophical Politics (Cambridge University Press, 1975). Richard F. Teichgraeber, 'Free Trade and Moral Philosophy: Rethinking the Sources of Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations (Duke University Press, 1986).

[252] Berry, Ibid., pp. 91-92.

[253] David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature (eds. L.A. Selby-Bigge, P.H. Nidditch; Oxford University Press, 1978), Book III, Part II, pp. 484-501. Adam Smith, Lectures on Jurisprudence (eds. R.L. Meek, D.D. Raphael, and P.G. Stein; Oxford University Press, 1978), esp pp. 200-222 . On the historicisation of moral philosophy in the work of Hume and Smith, see Knud Haakonssen, Ibid., especially pp. 1-19, pp. 36-39. On the importance of historical context for the judgement of human behaviour, see Haakonssen p. 68, pp. 79-82.

[254] See, for example, the distinction that Adam Ferguson drew between 'conjecture' and the method upon which his *Essay* was based. Adam Ferguson, Essay on the History of Civil Society (ed. Duncan Forbes; Edinburgh University Press, 1966),

wonder, to the various circumstances in which mankind had been placed.[255] The normal responses of modern, civilised man emerged only through a gradual process of *unfolding*, during which human nature elaborated itself through the creation of new needs and desires in society. Society, and the key principle of sociability, lay at the centre of this process of development: through intercourse, mutual wants were discovered which drove on the process of refinement and accumulation of new and ever more diverse qualities.

The story that conjectural historians told was ideal and rational, and avoided the deviations, complexities and disruptions of particular history: conjectural history was above all a simple history, in which all appearances and developments were fundamentally referable to a few key principles.[256] However, the conjectural-theoretical method was extendible to a vast variety of subjects. Stewart's division of the comparison of rude and modern societies into four categories- intellectual acquirements, opinions, manners, and institutions- allowed for the construction, by conjectural methods, of very diverse histories: histories of the arts and sciences, the exertions of the mind, different forms of behaviour and belief, and of social institutions.[257] The aim of the conjectural historians, enunciated by Stewart, was to produce a "regular and connected detail of human improvement", but the digressive tendencies of conjectural history were powerful, and Stewart noted that it was possible for conjectural accounts to conflict with each other without damaging their mutual claims to probability.[258] The possibility of a proliferation of mutually exclusive or parallel histories multiplying

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[255] Hume, 'Natural History of Religion', Ibid. Adam Smith, 'History of Astronomy' Essays on Philosophical Subjects (ed. W.P.D. Wightman, J.C.Bryce and I.S. Ross; Oxford, 1980), pp. 33-105.
[256] Andrew Skinner, 'Natural History in the Age of Adam Smith', Political Studies 15 (1967), pp. 32-48.
[257] Stewart, 'Adam Smith', pp. 32-37.
[258] Ibid., p. 37.

endlessly was circumvented by the adoption of the 4-stage theory of history as a means of organising the materials, and synthesising conjectural histories into a single scheme of development.[259] All conjectural histories followed a similar trajectory, from rudeness and refinement, but the 4-stage theory provided a universally applicable map for this journey. Ultimately every activity, human artefact, every subject of historical inquiry, could be described and classified by referring it to the stage of society in which it was enmeshed. The 4-stage theory therefore functioned as a kind of chart, in which could be found the location of any particular society in its journey from savagery to modernity. Stadial theories of history started to take firm shape in Scotland in the 1750's, with Lord Kames' *Historical Law-Tracts* providing a 3-stage theory of historical development against which to evaluate the progress of law in society.[260] In its more developed form, in Smith's *Lectures on Jurisprudence* and Millar's *Origins of the Distinction of Ranks*, 4-stage theory divided world history into 4 distinct phases, each related to the 'means of subsistence', and each with their representative type: the 'savage' hunter-gatherer; the nomadic shepherd; the agrarian farmer; and the fourth, commercial, economic man.[261] Such a classificatory scheme was not strictly speaking new: as Roger Emerson has shown, the precedents for stadial thinking, classical and biblical, were pervasive in western culture.[262] 4-stage theory was, however, uniquely concerned with the evolution of forms of property-holding, and it developed directly from the historicised

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[259] As Christopher Berry has contended, the 4-stage theory provided a principle of intelligibility and structure to the new history. Berry, Ibid., p. 114.
[260] Ronald L. Meek, Social Science and the Ignoble Savage (Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 102-113.
[261] Adam Smith, Lectures on Jurisprudence (eds. R.L. Meek, D.D. Raphael, and P.G. Stein; Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 200-222.
[262] Roger L. Emerson, 'Conjectural History and Scottish Philosophers', Historical Papers/ Communications historiques (1984), pp. 63-90.

accounts of property and justice provided by Pufendorf and his followers.[263] It had the advantages of simplicity and explanatory force: it simplified the appearances of social life and property ownership into four discrete categories. As a heuristic device, it was capable of extension, as Millar in particular proved, into almost every area of life, and could be used to explain the formation of institutions, forms of behaviour, customs, laws and domestic relationships at every level of society. From the description of the categories of 'subsistence' everything else followed: patterns of authority; domestic relationships; sexual behaviour; love; the very notions of freedom and independence.[264]

Four-stage theory was in essence a history of character. It used the character-type as its basic subject of analysis, and it made the growing diversification of character a sign and symptom of social progress. At the heart of four-stage theory was the concept of division of labour. This connected the history of economic organisation and social relations with a history of social identity. The savage, with a rudimentary social existence, possessed a character that was largely determined by his immediate physical environment and most basic sensations. He was an 'individual' not in the sense of possessing a highly individuated identity, but rather the reverse: his characteristics were identical to those of all other savages, with only

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[263] Istvan Hont, 'The language of sociability and commerce: Samuel Pufendorf and the theoretical foundations of the '4-stages Theory'', in Pagden, Anthony, (ed.), The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 253-76; Duncan Forbes, Hume's Philosophical Politics (Cambridge University Press, 1975). Haakonssen, Ibid., pp. 154-178.

[264] Berry, pp. 93-115. Roy Pascal, 'Property and Society: The Scottish Historical School of the Eighteenth Century', in Modern Quarterly, I (1938), pp. 167-179; Duncan Forbes ' "Scientific Whiggism": Adam Smith and John Millar', Cambridge Journal, 7 (1954), pp. 643-670; Andrew Skinner, 'Economics and History: The Scottish Enlightenment', Scottish Journal of Political Economy 12 (1965), pp. 1-22. Andrew Skinner, 'Natural History in the Age of Adam Smith', Political Studies 15 (1967), pp. 32-48. Ronald L. Meek,, 'The Scottish Contribution to Marxist Sociology', in Saville, J. (ed.), Democracy and the Labour Movement (London, 1954), pp. 84-102. Ronald. L. Meek, Social Science and the Ignoble Savage (Cambridge University Press, 1976). H.M Höpfl, 'From Savage to

minor and accidental differences of temperament. Lacking all form of specialisation, the savage had no social role to play, no special function to perform, nothing to distinguish himself from his fellows except a greater proficiency at the martial exploits in which they all engaged. In the savage state, there were few roles available, and distinctions between men were largely physical and 'natural'. The savage state of existence could therefore be described entirely in terms of single undifferentiated 'character'.[265] The description of savage 'society' was nugatory, since it extended little further than the individual and his basic physical needs and responses. Entirely absorbed in themselves, the savage's social relations were distant, sporadic and irregular. Thus, if perception was restricted to a few immediate objects of sense, the savage's sense of himself and others was likewise confined. Character, both for the savage himself, and for the conjectural historian, was a simple question in the earliest stages of society.

As society progressed, however, individuals were increasingly divided into distinct ranks and social roles, and social relations become more complex with the emergence of relations of power and dependence, connected to the notion of property ownership. Thus, in the pastoral stage, the introduction of forms of wealth and property brought in their train a host of new ideas, and new ways of perceiving human beings. Firstly, the development of a chieftain, with his followers, becomes regularised through heredity: the precedence that riches bring are transposed upon the individual. Men are increasingly measured in ways relating not to personal characteristics, but according to more complex social values, not simply their

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Scotsman: Conjectural History in the Scottish Enlightenment' , Journal of British Studies 17 (1978), pp. 20-40.

[265] These characteristics are all to be found in Robertson's analysis of the character of the American, in the section headed 'the powers and qualities of their minds': HA, II, pp. 88-102.

wealth, but also their fulfilment of certain roles and duties, their status. With property certain basic human passions are refined, and begin to alter their meaning: thus, resentment is attached to the invasion of the rights of property, rather than simply those relating to the person, and this becomes the basis of justice. In addition, property and wealth become the spur to emulation and competition, the motor of human improvement. Distinctions between men breed dissatisfaction, and new needs eventually foster in the imagination a projecting ambition and a concomitant concern for futurity that was lacking in the savage. Followers, in attaching themselves to a master, come to define themselves in terms of their duty to their master and to the tribe as a whole, and so take on a specific social role. Nonetheless, even in the pastoral stage character is a relatively simple matter. What has happened is that a gulf has opened up between the chieftain and the rest of the tribe, and the differences between them are exaggerated. Society begins for the first time to possess force, and the ability to concentrate its combined efforts and resources in a single man. In terms of narrative history, this is the semi-mythical heroic age, in which great deeds are performed by superhuman kings whose ambitions are vast but featureless, and whose exploits mirror their mobility and speed but are equally transient. The deification of martial qualities is most marked in this age, restless, unsettled, constantly in motion. Beneath the glorious veneer of the conquering chieftain, however, is a chaos of struggle for precedence, a chaos that marks the histories of the Tartars: as Sir William Jones said, "if they speak truth, the ancient history of the Tartars presents us, like most other histories, with a series of assassinations, plots, treasons, massacres, and all the natural fruits of selfish ambition. I should have no inclination to give you a sketch of such horrors, even if the occasion called for it".[266] The single heroic

[266] Sir William Jones, Discourses Delivered at the Asiatick Society 1785-1792 (London, 1993), p. 80. Cf. Gibbon's remarks upon the pastoral stage of human history: HDF, I, pp. 1023-1042; II, pp. 376-

individual as the representative of the active forces of a dynamic society is the product of the pastoral age, as is the struggle to achieve precedence, to gain the visible signs of wealth that would transform your character into this idealised image. It was in this age that narrative history was most likely born, in the form of epic poems. The bathetic nature of these heroic exploits, their pitiful smallness and inconsequentiality, or if grand, their shocking and meaningless slaughter, is a modern discovery. It is a spectacle of ambition apparently vast, but lacking variation or interest: a mere exercise of brute power. Nonetheless, there are real limitations on this power, located in the poverty of the society.

As stadial history moved into its later stages, agriculture and commerce, it begins to shed its close identification with characterology. This is because as the motor of exchange starts to transform the nature of human society and activity, social roles and functions become ever more diverse. As agriculture and then commerce are established, it is no longer possible for society to be described in terms of a static and unified character. Rather, society becomes a complex web of interactions between different and diverse characters, and this can only be represented through appreciating the interconnections between a variety, and indeed a hierarchy, of characters. In the ages of agriculture and commerce, the patterns of stadial history are unable to encompass all the changes and forms of actual history. As the example of classical and medieval history showed, agriculture and commerce as distinct stages could become confusingly intermixed. The feudal system itself was incapable of being fitted neatly

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433. J.G.A. Pocock, 'Gibbon and the Shepherds: the Three Stages of Society in the *Decline and Fall*', History of European Ideas 2 (1981), pp. 193-202.

into the straitjacket of 4-stage theory.[267] It was necessary therefore for the historian to be circumspect and to be sensitive to the exigencies of historical accident. Above all, though, the history of the last two stages of human history is the story of the progressive elaboration of human character into ever more diverse characters.[268] As human nature diversified and gained in complexity, history could only be written in terms of complex social reactions. Nicholas Capaldi has shown that Hume's historicised philosophy was essentially about the creation and constant redefinition of social roles, and the rules governing them, and that this also provided the individuals inhabiting those roles a means of themselves bringing about change by participating actively in their redefinition.[269] Smith saw social development in terms of the shifting expectations concerning individuals and the standards of propriety by which they were to regulate their behaviour and with which they judged others. Modern society, as Smith had described it in the *Theory of Modern Sentiments* (1759), was a process of complex adjustment to the norms and judgements of society, controlled and enforced by the shadowy but omnipresent figure of the impartial spectator.[270] In his *Lectures on*

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[267] On the place of the feudal system in the Scottish Enlightenment, see Peter Burke, 'Scottish Historians and the feudal system: the conceptualisation of social change', in Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 191, (1980), pp. 537-539.

[268] As J.C. Bryce has pointed out, an interest in character was one by-product of Smith's studies. Thus, one of Smith's pupils, William Richardson, Professor of Humanity at Glasgow, published A Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters (Edinburgh, 1774). See 'Introduction' to Smith, LRBL, p. 17. Spencer J. Pack, Capitalism as a Moral System, Chapter 8, pp. 138-160 sees Smith's analysis of Capitalism as a question of 'character formation'. J. Ralph Lindgren, Social Philosophy of Adam Smith (The Hague, 1973), pp. 39-59 on the psychological implications of 4-stage theory.

[269] Nicholas Capaldi, 'Hume as Social Scientist', in Stanley Tweyman (ed.), David Hume: Critical Assessments VI, pp. 1-23.

[270] Adam Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments. See D.D. Raphael, 'The impartial spectator', in A. Skinner and T. Wilson (eds.), Essays on Adam Smith (Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 83-99. On Smith and the construction of society through the mechanism of spectatorial sympathy, see John Mullen, Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century (Oxford, 1988), esp. pp. 44-56. The spectator, with as Mullen has pointed out, its Stoic overtones, was a useful *persona* for the historian as for the philosopher, since it enabled him to remove himself from the passions that he was depicting. See David Womersley, The Transformation of the Decline and Fall of

Jurisprudence, the foundational text of 4-stage theory, Smith had shown how the impartial spectator operated historically to alter the very connections of and perceptions of people regarding property, for instance. It was the impartial spectator who instructed man to control and refine his resentment, and by doing so contrived to make resentment a very different kind of motive:

> Now in all cases the measure of the punishment to be inflicted is the concurrence of the impartial spectator with the resentment of the injured [271]

The refinement of a passion such as resentment is at the very heart of four-stage theory history: by becoming the basis of justice, resentment, a basic component of human nature, is altered out of recognition: it no longer operates as the same passion. The shift from stage to stage entailed a shift in standards of propriety, of appropriate behaviour, and therefore in the reception and response to motives. The basic drives of human nature were each time channelled into new forms of activity, and absorbed into new social systems and arrangements, and this altered the nature of the motivating passion. The impartial spectator, and the process of social bargaining for which that figure stood as representative, had the power to transform the springs of action.

To return to Robertson's manifesto of the history of the human mind, it can be seen that Robertson was primarily interested in the mind in action: in the *motions* of desire and affection, in the *exertion* of its powers and faculties. Yet Book IV of the *History of America*

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the Roman Empire (Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 20-38, on the historian as Stoic in the form of David Hume.

disguises this priority, because it was compelled by its subject matter, the static American, to be a discourse on inaction. In Book I of the *History of America* and in the *View of the Progress of Society*, however, Robertson had provided conjectural-historical accounts of the human mind in action, in order to illuminate and explain the narrative. This was because of the essential variability in the meaning of human motivation, depending upon the social and intellectual context. While the same basic drives of human nature propelled men into action, notably the universal properties of ambition and resentment, these abstract notions depended crucially upon the objects available to the senses, the perceptions, and finally the value system, the ideas concerning propriety, of the society in which they operated. For Robertson, 4-stage theory provided not merely a history drawn from the conjecture of motives, but a history of motivation itself, and therefore provided the essential background for the presentation and assessment of character. It was Robertson's insight, in the *History of Charles V*, that the stage upon which narrative history was set, with all of its conventional theatrical props, was not a universal given. Rather, it was the creation of a historical process that involved the evolution of forms of political action and motivation. In other words, the conditions for historical narrative itself were subject to great alterations, not only at the social, institutional level, as Sarpi and the Taciteans had noticed, but also at the level of the meaning annexed to the terms conventionally used by narrative historians, ambition, resentment and interest. With the *View of the Progress of Society*, we see Robertson applying the Smithian concept of the spectatorial construction of modern society to the emergence of modern politics as a form of complex social interaction, and as the outcome of a procedure of emulation in which characters were elaborated as individuals began to act in different ways.

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[271] Smith, LJ, p. 104. Smith also invokes the spectator in the establishment of 'personal' rights, LJ, pp. 87-88.

If the savage's history consisted of nothing more than a dissertation upon character, the complexities of modern Europe could not be contained within such a unitary form.

Chapter Four

The History of Resentment and *The History of Scotland*

Introduction

To contemporaries, the *History of Scotland* was the most classically pure of Robertson's works. As the Earl of Bute wrote to John Home: "I have read again and again your friend's history, & cannot express how much it pleases me; the opening and winding up are magnificent; the characters equal to anything I ever read; & the style noble, animated and pure".[272] Robertson's correspondent Dr John Blair gave him an insight into the reception of his history in London society: "Prince Edward is in raptures with it we read it both morning and forenoon together and along with it we run over all the authoritys you quote", and, according to the opinion of the Earls of Bath and Chesterfield "Your stile is much liked, the Characters drawn with judgement & a true knowledge of Life & your observations introduced with great propriety".[273] Horace Walpole, one of its most enthusiastic admirers, was particularly impressed by the extent of political sagacity and insight displayed by an obscure and humble provincial cleric: indeed, it appeared to him that *Scotland* was the work of an "able Embassador who had seen much of affairs", the highest compliment that could be paid to a non-politician by one at the centre of affairs in London.[274] However, as Robertson's career progressed the limitations of the *History of Scotland* became apparent. The most celebrated parts of his subsequent histories were the theoretical sections, the *View of the Progress of Society* or Book IV of the *History of America. Scotland* offered nothing comparable to such experiments in historiography. It is very much a narrative work, focused upon events. Indeed, it was the mismatch between the grandeur and uniqueness of the events

[272] Bute to Home, 20th February 1759. Quoted in James L. McKelvey, 'William Robertson and Lord Bute', Studies in Scottish Literature 6 (1968-9), pp.238-247: p. 238.
[273] John Blair to Robertson, 25th January 1759, National Library of Scotland MS 3942: f. 7.
[274] Walpole to Robertson, 7th March 1769, NLS MS 3942 f. 87.

of the sixteenth century, and the failure of Scottish historians to produce a history commensurate with them, that had inspired Robertson with the belief that he could make a contribution to Scottish historiography.[275] Its function, however, was not simply to relate events, but to provide a full neo-classical Baconian narrative of motives and characters: as the *Monthly Review* had written, "it is not a dry jejune narrative of events, destitute of ornament". [276] In form, therefore, it adhered to the humanist framework, and seemed to eschew formal experimentation: as Jeffrey Smitten has pointed out, it is apparently shapeless in structure. [277] This apparent shapelessness however was related to the insistence and rapidity of the narrative: the skill with which Robertson had blended his materials into 'one uninterrupted story' had been remarked upon by Walpole, and received Gilbert Elliot's fulsome praise: "I had certainly neither leisure nor inclination to exercise the function of a Critick, carried long with the stream of narration". [278]

In content, also, it covered traditional Scottish historical problems and concerns. Drawing largely upon the traditional accounts provided by Buchanan, Knox, Spottiswoode and Calderwood, Robertson rehearses the conventional themes of the guilt of Mary Stuart and the Providential triumph of the Scottish reformation. In this, as David Allan has argued, Robertson represents the essential continuity of 'enlightened' historiography with the

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[275] See Robertson's review of David Moyses' Memoirs of the Affairs of Scotland, which appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* 1 (1755), pp. 23-27: MWC, pp. 58-62. "There is not, however, in any nation of Europe, a period of equal activity and importance, which hath produced so few writers of history or memoirs. The Scotch of that age, were more capable of performing than of describing great actions". See also William Maitland, Preface to *The History and Antiquities of Scotland* (1757) quoted in the Monthly Review 17 (1757), pp. 461-462: "It is easy to conceive how jarring must be the accounts of Scottish historians, how dissimilar the characters of the persons they describe, and of consequence how very difficult their task, who would write a history of Scotland".

[276] Monthly Review 20 (1759), pp. 177-178.

[277] Jeffrey Smitten, 'Robertson's History of Scotland: Narrative Structure and the Sense of Reality', Clio 11 (1981), pp. 29-47.

humanist and Calvinist tradition of historical scholarship. Mary Fearnley-Sander has also seen the impetus for Robertson's *Scotland* not in any specifically 'philosophical' mission but in the expansion of documents and the revitalisation of debate concerning the character and actions of Mary Stuart by Walter Goodall's publication of *An Examination of the Letters of Mary Queen of Scots* in 1754. Thus, Robertson was connecting himself with the antiquarian and polemical disputes of traditional Scottish historical discourse, despite the ideological attempt of 'enlightened' historians to distance themselves from a barbarous and faction-ridden past. According to Allan, the "Scottish tradition of historical writing still remained, at bottom, a vehicle for factional bickering and the fiercest polemic", and Robertson himself added to this tradition with his *Dissertation on the murder of King Henry*, appended to the second edition of the *History of Scotland.* Fearnley-Sander dismisses those elements of Robertson's History which have been bracketed as 'philosophical', in particular his politicised treatment of religion, as essentially derived from a close adherence to the canonical texts of the Scottish Reformation, especially Knox's history.[279]

In form and content, then, Robertson's history appears to be an unexceptional account of a central period of Scottish history, lacking the kind of 'philosophical' or quasi-sociological analysis that came to dominate and define his subsequent historical works. Yet Robertson's *History of Scotland* did to an extent represent a break with Scotland's historiographical past. Firstly, the scale of its reception in England and Europe, as a work of polite literature, granted it a readership unrivalled in Scottish historiography since Buchanan. Its elegance and

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[278] Elliot to Robertson, 20th January 1759, NLS MS 3942, ff. 5-6.
[279] David Allan, Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment: Ideas of Scholarship in Early Modern History (Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p. 165. Mary Fearnley-Sander, 'Philosophical

stylistic classicism were seen by English and Continental contemporaries, who perceived only a barren gap between Buchanan and Robertson, as a radical break with the barbarism and poverty of Scottish antiquarianism and polemic.[280] The supposed novelty of Robertson's style was underlined in his authorial stance, his claim to impartiality and to mediate between the entrenched positions of two violently opposed parties. Robertson's impartiality, however, was no mere pose. It was accompanied by a willingness to rethink and radically to redraw certain elements of the Scottish past. As both Colin Kidd and Karen O'Brien have detected, Robertson was determined to destroy or at least paralyse the factional disputes of the past, through a careful manipulation and selection of materials, and a precise awareness and calculation of the probable effect of his disposition of materials on the reader. For Kidd, Robertson's history was profoundly but subtly revisionist, indeed subversive, presenting a new critical, 'enlightened' patriotism in place of the old Whig certainties of Buchananite historiography. The overall effect of Robertson's narrative was to legitimise a reinterpretation of the Scottish Reformation, contextualising it, and so enabling Robertson to distance himself from its events without repudiating its principles. Robertson was, in Kidd's view, skilful at weaving together different influences and emphases, traditional Whig and revisionist, while minimising the inconsistency. The ambiguity of Robertson's narrative can be seen in the two very different readings of Robertson's portrayal of Knox by Allan and Kidd: while Allan sees Robertson's depiction of Knox as straightforwardly providential,

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History and the Scottish Reformation: William Robertson and the Knoxian Tradition', Historical Journal, 33, 2 (1990), pp. 323-338.

[280] For example, Carlo Denina, An Essay on the Revolutions of Literature (trans. John Murdoch; London, 1771), pp. 280-281: "Doctor Robertson is above all entitled to immortality for the pains which he has taken to illustrate the history of Scotland. In judgement he has equalled the most renowned historians of any nation, in style surpassed not only his countrymen, but the most elegant authors in England".

Kidd sees it as ironic and iconoclastic.[281] O'Brien demonstrates that Robertson's modulation of language enabled him to neutralise the Jacobite historical case, reducing it through the language of sentiment to an aesthetic and emotional attitude. Similarly, by employing a 'classical-constitutional' vocabulary, Robertson played upon his audience's deep emotional attachment to the martial virtues of Scottish feudalism while indelibly and nostalgically associating it with the lost, irrecoverable past. In both cases, their language was associated with failure and ineffectiveness, while evoking a positive emotional response; neither could be presented as a viable alternative to the dominant language of modernism and cosmopolitanism which became the keynote of the closing passages on the Union.[282]

Robertson certainly claimed, as a justification for writing his history, the intention to place characters and events "in a new light". As Gilbert Stuart remarked bitterly, "he affects to place facts in new lights; he affects to draw characters with new colours. But go to his historic predecessors...& you are somewhat scandalised to find there his new lights, and his new colours".[283] Yet Robertson's *History of Scotland*, as Kidd and O'Brien have both

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[281] Colin Kidd, 'The ideological significance of Robertson's *History of Scotland*, WREE, pp. 122-44; Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish whig historians and the creation of an Anglo-British identity 1689-c.1830 (Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.191-197. Allan, ibid., p. 209.

[282] Karen O'Brien, Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan history from Voltaire to Gibbon (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 93-128. Further, overlapping accounts of Robertson by O'Brien are to be found in 'Enlightenment History in Scotland: the case of William Robertson', Transactions of the Eighth International Congress on the Enlightenment (Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, Oxford, 1992), pp.467-471; 'Between Enlightenment and Stadial History: William Robertson on the History of Europe', British journal for Eighteenth Century Studies 16 (1993), pp.53-63; 'Robertson's place in the development of eighteenth-century narrative history', WREE , pp. 74-91.

[283] Gilbert Stuart, Critical Observations Concerning the Scottish Historians Hume, Stuart and Robertson (London, 1782), p. 49. Stuart was particularly interested in the representation of character: see the parallel 'characters' from his own History of Mary Queen of Scots, and from Robertson's History of Scotland that he prints opposite each other for easy comparison. The claims made by Stuart are undermined somewhat in the NLS copy, in which a reader had scribbled in the margin: "Every one may easily see that Stewarts' Characters are a shameful piece of plagiarism", Ibid., p.34. On Gilbert Stuart and Robertson, see William Zachs, Without Regard to Good Manners: A Biography of Gilbert

noticed, is both radical and innovative in its depiction of Scottish history. While it is imperfectly 'theoretical', Robertson has begun to integrate into the work some of the themes and obsessions of theoretical history. His introduction on the Scottish constitution is in part a fascinating meditation upon the nature of historical events which, if it does not develop the full implications of its analysis, does place the structure and tendencies of the feudal system squarely at the heart of any interpretation of Scottish history. His digressions, upon political assassination and upon religion, are, while inadequately fitted into the structure of the work as a whole, necessary and important additions to the narrative, which reveal much about the nature of the events and actions that he depicts. It is this concern with the contextualisation of political action that distinguishes Robertson's *History of Scotland*, and which connects it with the much more ambitious and comprehensive *View*. This is most evident in Robertson's determination to place his account of Scottish history into a general European framework, to provide what Karen O'Brien has termed 'narrative cosmopolitan contextualisation'.[284] It governs his decision to write the history of the sixteenth century, and not the "third era" of Scottish history, that is, from the beginning of authentic documentation. It was during the sixteenth century that the history of Scotland becomes impossible to write without a keen sense of its interconnections with Europe: in order to comprehend the history of Scotland at that time, the historian (and reader) needed a "thorough knowledge of that general system, of which every kingdom in Europe forms a part". This, indeed, is "not less requisite towards understanding the history of a nation, than an acquaintance with its peculiar government and laws". Thus, Robertson outlines the importance of a bifocal introduction, and at the

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Stuart 1743-86 (Edinburgh University Press, 1992), esp. pp. 39, 44-45, 81-3, 99-124. And on Stuart's History of the Reformation in Scotland and its relationship to Robertson's History of Scotland, see pp. 131-164. Zachs sees Stuart's text as both more sentimental and tragic than the "calm and reassuring tone" of Robertson's.

conclusion of his account of the 'internal constitution' of Scotland, he provides a 'view of the political state of Europe'. In many ways, it is this dual vision that Robertson intends to use in order to distinguish his history from the 'bulk': "By attending to this, many dark passages in our history may be placed in a clear light, and where the bulk of historians have seen only the effect, we may be able to discover the cause".[285] Robertson here explains to the reader why most historians have failed to interpret correctly the events of that remarkable age, and why his own historiographical machinery has enabled him to place facts in a different light, and draw characters with "new colours".[286] The rise of the European states system, which is of course the keynote of the *View of the Progress of Society*, is used in the earlier history as a means of reconstructing an alternative Scottish history. The broader meanings that Robertson attaches to the development of the new politics in Europe are as yet only barely glimpsed in *Scotland*, but this is the result in part of the limiting nature of Scottish history. Thus, the similarities between Book I of *Scotland* and the *View* disclose themselves: both were designed to explain the conditions of action in which the narratives were to take place, and against which the characters were to be made explicable. Both probed the relationship between the internal constitution and the external force of the state, and saw the sixteenth century as quintessentially the age of interaction and communication between states. Both culminated in a narrative of great and striking events that altered the nature of modern political history. Indeed, in many ways, the themes of *Charles V* emerged naturally from Robertson's encounter with the particular history of his own nation. In some ways,

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[284] O'Brien, Narratives of Enlightenment, pp. 1-19.
[285] HS, I, pp. 87-88.
[286] HS, I, p. v. The *Monthly Review* appreciated this use of Book I as the distinguishing factor of Robertson's work: the common failing of historians was their abrupt detailing of events without first supplying the principles upon which these facts were based. "The very learned and ingenious author of the history before us, seems to have been thoroughly apprised of the expedience of leading the reader

therefore, *Scotland* can be seen as an experimental prototype of the much more ambitious *Charles V*. The differences between *Scotland* and *Charles V* remain striking, however, and demonstrate the extent to which the process of writing *Scotland* had altered Robertson's vision of history. Robertson's movement from the writing of a single national history to the simultaneous contemplation of a network of overlapping narratives represented not simply an enlargement of his historical vision, but embodied a series of conclusions concerning the nature of the historical process that he had learned from the close analysis of the history of Scotland.

2. The Context of Scottish History

Robertson's wide-ranging and comprehensive introduction to the narrative was at once a compression of Scottish history for a predominantly non-Scottish audience, an overview of the Scottish constitution, and an embryonic exercise in the kind of theoretical history that the *View of the Progress of Society* was later to establish as Robertson's milieu. Certainly Book I was larger and more inclusive than a conventional introduction needed to be, and Robertson saw it not merely as a customary exercise, but as a crucial instrument in his purpose of writing the history of Scotland. It integrated Scottish history into the general framework of European development, reinterpreted Scottish history not as an autonomous and self-enclosed martial epic, but as a peculiar and exaggerated form of feudalism, and provided a conjectural account of the rise of feudal aristocracy as a form of government. Thus, Book I was ambitious in its scope and purpose, certainly in comparison with most conventional

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through the regular progress of natural causes and fundamental institutions, before he enters upon a detail of particular events". Reprinted in *Scots Magazine*, 21 (1759), pp. 126-127.

humanist introductions. Furthermore, Robertson saw it as a necessary means of contextualising the nature of political action and motivation in the subsequent narrative, since one of the special features of Scottish feudal government was its tenacity and longevity:

> Nothing however demonstrates so fully the extent of their [the nobles'] power, as the length of its duration. Many years after the declension of the feudal system in the other kingdoms of Europe, and when the arm or policy of princes had, every where, shaken, or laid it in ruin, the foundations of that ancient fabric remained, in a great measure, firm and untouched in Scotland. [287]

More than any other power in sixteenth century Europe, Scotland was haunted by the ghosts of the feudal system.[288] By placing Scottish history in a comparative framework, that measured it directly against its closest neighbours France and England, Robertson was attempting to free Scotland from the insular obsessions and factionalism that had plagued all Scottish historiography. He wanted to see Scotland straight, as a nation both partially within and yet also outwith the general movements of European history. Thus the analysis of feudalism was ultimately used, as Colin Kidd has observed, in order to provide a revisionist account of pre-modern Scottish history. One of the principal aims of Book I is to redraw the character of the Scottish nobility, to recast them not as patriotic and heroic defenders of the ancient Scottish constitution, but as marauding *banditti*, the products of a fundamentally

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[287] HS, I, pp. 38-39; on p.21 Robertson shows how defective the system of justice was even "so late as the year one thousand five hundred and sixty-one".

[288] Poland's elective monarchy was a similar case study in the chaos of a disordered political system. See Adam Smith, LJ, p. 189, p. 266, p. 288, where the feudal system "still however subsists in full vigour".

weak and corrupted social organisation, the feudal system.[289] This entailed a reconfiguration of the entire course of Scottish history, and a fundamental re-evaluation of the pattern and structure of its events. Horace Walpole congratulated Robertson on restoring meaning to the history of feudal government, and asserting its centrality to all subsequent history: "you have so clearly & agreeably explained that formerly unintelligible system, that modern History will now seem unintelligible without it".[290]

Book I is structured around a central conflict, that between the monarchy and the nobility. This is the structure of events throughout medieval Europe, and in this Scotland's history conforms to that of Europe as a whole. It is the character of the feudal aristocracy which determines the nature of medieval history and shapes its events. As Robertson glumly concedes, the "history of Europe, during several ages, contains little else but the accounts of the wars and revolutions occasioned by their exorbitant ambition".[291] Robertson's dismissive attitude towards the history of middle ages is rooted in this observation, and from it comes his desire to avoid delving too deeply into a particular narrative of events that are by their nature barren and unedifying.[292] Robertson's interest is located firmly in the modern era, and specifically the transitional period in which Europe frees itself from the tyranny of lawless and rapacious barons. The events of the middle ages appear to lack rationality or even interest for a modern audience. Moreover they are essentially repetitive, and Book I is used as a means of identifying those chief characteristics which enable the reader to see clearly and without distortion the shape and pattern of events, rather than be forced to confront their

[289] Kidd, Subverting Scotland's Past, pp 180-184; Kidd, WREE, pp. 125-135.
[290] Walpole to Robertson, 4th February 1759, NLS MS 3942: ff. 13-14.
[291] HS, I, p. 25.

hideous and exhausting details. By drawing forcefully and vividly the character of the nobility, Robertson gives his readers all they need to know about the nature and tendencies of Scottish feudal history. In his vignette on the state of Scotland on the return of James I, Robertson encapsulates the dominant motifs of the early history of Scotland:

> The licence of many years had rendered the nobles independent. Universal anarchy prevailed. The weak were exposed to the rapine and oppression of the strong. In every corner some barbarous chieftain ruled at pleasure, and neither feared the king, nor pitied the people. [293]

Nonetheless, Robertson has a deeper aim in his eschewal of a connected and detailed narrative of the events of the 'third era' of Scottish history. The surface of events appears to show nothing but the endless feuding of rival nobles, each intent upon plundering from and encroaching upon the other, all engaged in internecine slaughter and conflict. While anarchy is the *leitmotif* of Robertson's interpretation of feudal government, Book I attempts to uncover the underlying rationale, the ordering structure, behind these chaotic events. He finds it in the *longue durée*, in the shape revealed by a study of the protracted conflict of the nobility and the monarchy over many centuries. Thus, the nobility, so easily split in warring bands or competing warlords, is shown by Robertson to be in reality a unified body, compact enough to act as a single entity in order to preserve its essential interests:

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[292] J.A. Black has made the point that Robertson is only a historian of the middle ages by default, and not by choice: Ibid., p.128.
[293] HS, I: pp. 49-50.

> When nobles are numerous, their operations nearly resemble those of the people; they are roused only by what they feel, not by what they apprehend... A small body, on the contrary, is more sensible, and more impatient; quick in discerning, and prompt in repelling danger, all its motions are as sudden as those of the other are slow. Hence proceeded the extreme jealousy with which the Scottish nobles observed their monarchs, and the fierceness with which they opposed their encroachments.[294]

This unity and purposiveness belies the apparent chaos inherent in the feudal 'anarchy'. When their interests as a common body, as an institution, are threatened by the crown, they are capable of sinking their differences, and coalescing into a formidable association. Indeed, this is a trait most strongly pronounced in the close-knit aristocracy of Scotland, with their penchant for leagues and bonds of association, as compared with the larger and more diffuse nobilities of other European nations.

In Robertson's scheme, the nobility are peculiarly alive to their singularity, their difference from other classes of men: thus demarcated, they perceive their common interest with great clarity. Robertson also sees the monarchy in terms of an essential continuity of interest and purpose, despite the fluctuations occasioned by the divisibility of his analysis of the monarchy into a series of character sketches of the individual monarchs:

> This conduct of our monarchs, if we rest satisfied with the accounts of their historians, must be considered as flowing entirely from their resentment against particular noblemen; and all their attempts to humble them must be viewed as the sallies of private passion, not as the consequences of any general plan of policy. But

[294] HS, I: p. 30

> though some of their actions may be imputed to those passions, though the different genius of the men, the temper of the times, and the state of the nation, necessarily occasioned great variety in their schemes; yet, without being chargeable with excessive refinement, we may affirm that their end was uniformly the same; and that the project of reducing the power of the aristocracy, sometimes avowed, and pursued with vigour; sometimes concealed, or seemingly suspended; was never altogether abandoned.[295]

Despite the localised fluctuations of individual events and characters, the underlying motives of both the crown and the aristocracy remain unchanged, rooted in the calculation that each has made concerning their interest. Thus, in part, the novelty that Robertson claims for his analysis lies in the extent to which he has freed the discussion of Scottish history from the meaningless depictions of narrative historians, who perceive only the occasional and fluctuating passions of individual men, without paying heed to the underlying links between otherwise discrete events and characters.

Robertson writes of this conflict between crown and nobility in terms of mutually exclusive ambitions: the 'encroaching' ambition of the nobility upon the supine body of the monarchy; and the more legitimate but less effectual ambition of the monarchy to translate into reality the ideal powers accorded to it by the fiction of the feudal constitution. That Scottish history is at heart reducible to competing ambitions offers few surprises: ambition is of course the lifeblood of the historical process. Yet Robertson describes these ambitions very differently. The nobles, in a sense, embody the spirit and principle of ambition: they are dynamic,

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[295] HS, I: pp. 46-7.

restless, bold, imaginative, and ingenious in finding ways to extend their power over both the bodies and minds of men. Robertson's conjectural-historical account of the rise of the aristocracy

from the ruins of the fall of Rome shows how they embed themselves in the interests of their followers, and make secure their possession of almost supreme power through their manipulation of principles in the human mind. Thus Robertson shows the process whereby claims inherently absurd and pernicious, such as the extension of their power to criminal jurisdiction, the rendering of their lands hereditary, and their annexation of the chief offices of state, were imposed upon the generality of the people, and accepted as natural and inevitable by them. The nobles are possessed by what appears to Robertson to be a "preposterous ambition", but nonetheless it has its own internal rationale, and is supremely successful. The establishment of entails is seen by Robertson as in a sense the boldest stroke of their ambition:

> Not satisfied with having obtained a hereditary right to their fiefs, which they formerly held during pleasure, their ambition aimed at something bolder, and by introducing *entails*, endeavoured, as far as human ingenuity and invention can reach that end, to render their possessions unalienable and everlasting.[296]

In Robertson's sentence structure, the nobles have become merely the instrument through which ambition inscribes itself upon history: it has become the actor in the narrative. Ambition is so deeply entwined with the nature of the nobility that it acts through them, takes them over, and dictates the nature of their actions. Nonetheless, the ambition of the Scottish

[296] HS, I: pp. 23-4.

nobility is specific to their time and place, and manifests itself in appropriate forms. The aspiration of the nobles is towards a kind of pseudo- royalty: "The great hall of an ambitious baron was often more crowded than the court of his sovereign".[297] When the Earl of Douglas, in the minority of James II, achieves a condition of almost total independence, he apes in his own smaller territories the form and prerogatives of royal power: "forbidding his vassals to acknowledge any authority but his own, he created knights, appointed a privy-council, named officers civil and military, assumed every ensign of royalty but the title of king, and appeared in public with a magnificence more than royal".[298] The nobility, in their turbulence and violence, and more particularly in the success of their projects, subverted the relations which ought to exist between the ranks in a society: "Impatient of subordination, and forgetting their proper rank, such potent and haughty barons were the rivals, rather than the subjects, of their prince". The ambition of the nobles is always therefore viewed by Robertson as transgressive, unnatural and criminal: it is Albany's "unnatural ambition" that is the direct cause of the death of prince David and the continued captivity of James I.

The fundamental irony of aristocratic ambition is seen in the various attempts by powerful nobles to gain control of the instruments of the crown during the frequent periods of minority. The attempt to seize the supreme authority of the state also occasions the weakening of the royal instruments of power:

> They [Albany and his son] slackened the reins of government; they allowed the prerogative to be encroached upon; they suffered the most irregular acts of power,

[297] HS, I, p. 24.
[298] HS, I, pp. 36-7.

> and even wanton instances of oppression, to pass with impunity...and reduced the royal authority to a state of imbecillity, from which succeeding monarchs laboured in vain to raise it.[299]

The ambition of the nobility is in direct contradiction with the powers and authority of the state, therefore every exertion of the power by the magnates merely serves to squander and cripple the resources of the nation. This illustrates the tendency of feudal government towards a self-perpetuating disorder, a downward spiral of confusion and weakness. It necessarily circumscribes the ambitions of the nobility: their exclusive and absolute authority is confined to small parcels of territory, and no noble can seek to gain anything more than a temporary pre-eminence, since the organs of state power which would enable them to consolidate their authority are too weak.[300] Not only, therefore, is the ambition of the nobles, however ingenious, necessarily small-scale, it is constantly dissolving into the mutual jealousy, resentment and suspicion that characterises relations between the nobles. Thus, the unity of the nobility as an order, with their clear perception of their common interests, operates only when the monarchy is powerful enough to attack them. It is a defensive instinct. Otherwise, the power of the nobles disperses into a miasma of private passions. It is this which enables in other nations the monarchy to reassert its authority, and finally strip the nobles of their pretensions:

> Among nobles of a fierce courage, and of unpolished manners, surrounded with vassals bold and licentious, whom they were bound by interest and honour to protect, the causes of discord were many and unavoidable...It was the interest of the crown to

[299] HS, I, p. 36.

> foment rather than to extinguish these quarrels; and by scattering or cherishing the seeds of discord among the nobles, that union, which would have rendered the aristocracy invincible, and which must at once have annihilated the prerogative, was effectually prevented.[301]

Thus, there is a limit to the purposive action of the nobles: their dynamism is counteracted by the visible tendency of their activity towards chaos and indeed a kind of paralysis. This is why Robertson avoids writing the narrative of the period: it witnesses the collective sclerosis of the Scottish nation, beneath the ferocious activity of individual ambitions.

If the ambition of the nobles is ultimately both illegitimate and contemptible, the vision of the monarchs is at once grander and more legitimate. It is, however, rendered ineffectual both by the general conditions of feudal Europe, and by the particular factors operating within Scotland. Robertson is keen to exculpate Scottish kings both from claims of would-be tyranny, and from the charges of imprudence laid against them. Rather, he stresses the accidental factors that intervened to frustrate their schemes:

> If they were not attended with success, we must not, for that reason, conclude, that they were not conducted with prudence. Every circumstance seems to have combined against the crown. Accidental events concurred with political causes, in rendering the best concerted measures abortive. The assassination of one king, the sudden death of

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[300] In a sense, this protects the throne against outright usurpation.
[301] HS, I, pp. 41-2.

> another, and the fatal despair of a third, contributed no less than its own natural strength, to preserve the aristocracy from ruin.[302]

For this reason, Scotland is prevented from joining the general European development towards the centralisation and purposive exertion of state power. If such contingent and external factors had not arisen, then the ambition and policy of successive princes could have been the basis for an extensively remodelled Scottish polity. This is especially the case with James II, a character who is shown to understand the nature of power, possesses ample vigour with which to prosecute his ambitious schemes, and who, unlike James I, is capable of working within the constraints of the age and its prevailing manners. James II indeed is of a piece with both his nation and times, and pursues his aims with "the impetuosity natural to Scotsmen, and with the fierceness peculiar to that age". James' forceful humiliation of the Douglas family silences the nobility, and as a spectacle of "unsuccessful ambition" fills them with terror, and cuts off the source of their strength at the root:

> During the remainder of his reign, this prince pursued the plan which he had begun, with the utmost vigour; and had not a sudden death...prevented his progress, he wanted neither genius nor courage to protect it: and Scotland might, in all probability, have been the first kingdom in Europe which would have seen the subversion of the feudal system.[303]

In such accidents, of character as well as circumstance, does Robertson see the downfall of the feudal system. Yet Robertson's analysis of the collapse of feudalism is not entirely clear here. All princes throughout the middle ages attempted to humble the nobles: it was essential

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[302] HS, I, p. 78.

to their fundamental interest to do so. In many ways, it was the only course of action open to them, and the less sophisticated and imaginative they were, the more open and rash their assaults upon the bastions of aristocracy were. More prudent princes, with a more considered appreciation of the disadvantages under which they laboured, sought to "mitigate evils which they could not cure". Robertson sees however a shift in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries:

> ...time and accidents ripened the feudal governments for destruction. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, and the beginning of the sixteenth, all the princes of Europe attacked, as if by concert, the power of the nobles. Men of genius then undertook with success, what their unskilful predecessors had attempted in vain.[304]

Robertson's logic here is interesting: he assumes, as did most theorists, that feudal society was inherently unstable and untenable, and that feudal government 'ripened' towards its inevitable end.

Yet this progress is presented primarily in terms of the contingent actions and characters of princes. Something in the nature of princely action has changed, and rendered it both more forceful and consistent. The princes of the later period seem to possess a greater sagacity and prudence. His view of James II as a 'genius', possessing vigour and firmness, capable of clear and unclouded vision, is repeated in his brief assessments of Louis XI of France and Henry VII of England. Robertson does not elaborate on the process whereby princely action has become more refined and effective, or in what precise way the feudal structure has become weakened to the point where it totters. In part, that is because it is, literally, foreign to his purpose: Scotland has not joined this progress, and remains isolated from it. If, indeed,

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[303] HS, I, p. 57.

Robertson is implying a progress of kingship, a general raising of the level of prudence, this process is reversed in the case of Scotland: the two most able and sagacious princes, James I and James II, occur at the beginning of the sequence that Robertson surveys. The last three kings are all imprudent as well as unfortunate, despite Robertson's protestations. James III is a weakling, capricious, indolent, and impolitic. Robertson's mitigation of James III lies solely in the denial that he is a tyrant, and in the claim that the discontent and ambition of the grandees "were sufficient to have disturbed a more vigorous administration, and to have rendered a prince a superior talents unhappy".[305] In other words, the functional instabilities of the Scottish constitution would have triumphed over any character who attempted to combat them. James IV is a different and rather anomalous case: an embodiment of romantic chivalry, he possesses the desire for glory without the attention to interest that a king should possess. He is a character under the dominion of passions, admittedly noble and generous and therefore altogether distinct from those of James III, but nonetheless useless for the structural aggrandisement of the crown. True, he unites the nobles in the service of the crown, causes them to sink their interests, ambitions, resentments, in a national cause, but this can only be a temporary phenomenon, outside the pattern of interests and prudence that Robertson detects in the movement from feudalism to absolutism, and accordingly Robertson accords it little space.[306]

The crucial moment perhaps comes in the reign of James V, a period exactly contemporary with the reigns of Charles V and Francis I. In an age of great and illustrious princes,

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[304] HS, I, pp. 39-40.

[305] HS, I, p. 57-63: "James III discovered no less eagerness than his father or grandfather to humble the nobility, but far inferior to either of them in abilities and address, he adopted a plan extremely impolitic, and his reign was disastrous, as well as tragical".

Robertson remarks that James V was inferior to no prince of that age "in vigour of mind", and that he had benefited both from a study of his predecessors and from the schemes of his predecessors to produce a more exact and thorough system for the destruction of the nobles:

> The plan he formed for that purpose was more profound, systematic, and pursued with greater constancy and steadiness, than that of any of his ancestors...

James' penetration leads him to recruit the ambition of the clergy, in order to balance the exorbitant power of the nobility. His 'sagacity', and the vigilance of his ministers, are sufficient for a time to quell the resentment of the nobles. Yet, despite the careful calculation inherent in this exercise, James' failure is assured because of the collapse of his ambition into resentment and other immoderate passions. At the first setback, James is plunged into what Robertson calls a "fatal despair":

> He saw how vain and ineffectual all his projects to humble the nobles had been...Impatience, resentment, indignation, filled his bosom by turns. The violence of these passions altered his temper, and, perhaps, impaired his reason.
>
> Incapable of bearing these repeated insults, he found himself unable to revenge them...All the violent passions, which are the enemies of life, preyed upon his mind, and wasted and consumed a youthful and vigorous constitution.[307]

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[306] HS, I, pp. 63-64.
[307] HS, I, p. 75; p. 77.

James' death is represented by Robertson as a perfectly natural effect of the conjunction of his temperament with his situation, and he asserts against conspiracy theorists a common-sense medical interpretation of his death. Yet in a sense it is meant also to illustrate the crippling effects of the dysfunctional Scottish constitution upon an "ambitious and high-spirited" prince. The dissolution of James' concerted and systematic ambition into self-destructive resentment is the inescapable paradigm of Scottish history. James' lack of 'cultivation'- he is a "great but uncultivated spirit"- also parallels the basic and unrefined nature of political action in Scotland. Ambition is at its most passionate, its least ordered and controlled. Ambition in the narrative of the *History of Scotland* is constantly dissolving into resentment; or rather, the meaning affixed to ambition is less connected with the new conditions of political action, and is more closely connected to the passionate and constricted view of the medieval period. In this sense, the Scots, through their failure to develop a unified and purposive state structure, fail also to develop the new defining objects of ambition. At the end of Book I and the opening of the narrative, the old pattern of events has reasserted itself, by a mixture of accident and force of circumstance. Scotland is once again experiencing the distractions and power vacuum that a long minority represents.

Apart from the frustration of ambition, the other principal theme of the narrative is the preponderance of the primitive passion of resentment. As we shall see further, resentment is a ubiquitous factor in the events of Scottish history. Robertson's insistent and almost obsessive application of this descriptor for the actions and motives of his narrative at one level reveals little that is surprising. As Robertson himself maintains, "Resentment is, for

obvious and wise reasons, one of the strongest passions in the human mind".[308] In his discussion of the nature of political assassination, Robertson attempts to forge a link between the theoretical histories of Smith and Kames, which located resentment at the centre of their conjectural reconstructions of the origin of justice, and the pathological history of events that seemed to many to be so devoid of meaning. In this brief digression, Robertson shows the way in which conjectural analyses, and broad statements of human nature, could be used to illuminate the nature of political events, and to place a particular society at a specific stage of development in terms of its motives and objects. In a sense, the history of Scottish political development provides a 'counter-conjectural' history, in which the historian has to explain why more complex and sophisticated forms of justice did *not* appear in Scotland, why the natural progress of ideas did not occur. This Robertson puts down to the failure of political authority in Scotland. The unrefined, unrestrained principle of resentment therefore is able to operate in full freedom, and that is why its effects are so devastating. Robertson weaves resentment and its visible manifestations, civil war and assassination, into the themes of the narrative, making it the hinge upon which so many of the crucial dramatic moments of the narrative turn. As the curbing of resentment is a basic and necessary means of preventing the dissolution of society, the dominance of unbridled resentment as a principle of action is one sign that Scotland is close to total collapse, as Robertson makes clear on number of occasions. The proximity of Scotland to a primeval chaos is emphasised by Robertson on occasion:

> To nobles, haughty and independent, among whom the causes of discord were many and unavoidable, who were quick in discerning an injury, and impatient to revenge

[308] HS, I, p. 374.

> it...Under governments so feeble, men assumed, as in a state of nature, the right of judging, and redressing their own wrongs; and thus, assassination, a crime of all others the most destructive to society, came not only to be allowed, but to be reckoned honourable. [309]

The last point is important, since it underlines the self-perpetuating nature of resentment, once it is allowed uncontested sway over the actions of men. The reader carries away from the narrative a palpable sense of the power of resentment. This is one of the principal distinctions between modern and pre-modern forms of government, and the sixteenth century sees the last flowering of resentment as a straightforward principle of action.

Robertson's emphasis upon the unintelligibility of the narrative without the understanding of the shift in the European power structure seems excessive in the case of Scotland, which largely lies outside such patterns, unless by that Robertson also means that some other alteration in the nature of political action is going on. He supplies enough clues of this process: the discovery by the Italians of the "great secret of modern politics", and the shift from a strictly martial to a more complex political concept of power, the notion of 'balance'. One of the themes that anticipates Robertson's fuller treatment in the *History of Charles V* is that of observation:

[309] HS, I, p. 376.

> Every step any prince took was observed by his neighbours. Ambassadors, a kind of honourable spies, authorized by the mutual jealousy of kings, resided almost constantly at different courts, and had it in charge to watch all its motions.[310]

Most crucially, there is the alteration in the conduct of warfare:

> ...revenge or self-defence were no longer the only causes of hostility; it became common to take arms out of policy; and war, both in its commencement and in its operations, was more an exercise of the judgement than of the passions of men.[311]

The sixteenth century witnesses the beginning of a shift in the nature of motivation, in the refinement of political action away from passions and towards policy. This is connected with the nature of interaction between monarchs. However, as we shall see, this development is peripheral and in some ways irrelevant to the subsequent drama of the *History of Scotland.* Thus, while the *Monthly Review* claimed that by "this natural and skilful introduction, the reader's mind is prepared for the history of that period", this was because it enabled us to discover the causes of the "intestine commotions" of Scotland, not the transition to a new form of polity.[312]

<u>The Triumph of Resentment and the Disappointment of Ambition</u>

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[310] HS, I, p. 90.
[311] HS, I, p. 90.
[312] Monthly Review 20 (1759), p. 163.

At the beginning of the narrative, in what the *Monthly Review* archly termed an "affectation of the Sallustian manner", Robertson sets up a dual characterisation of Beatoun and Arran.[313] For purely narrative reasons, it is unclear precisely why he should introduce the history with two characters whose importance to the history as a whole fades after Book II. Beatoun's assassination and the increasingly peripheral role of Arran in the political development of Scottish affairs, does not give them a centrality which such Sallustian characterisations would merit. However, as a thematic device it enables Robertson to embody in a vivid and dramatic fashion two different and utterly opposed types of political action.[314]

Beatoun is represented as an entirely political character, a man whose actions are all geared towards the concerns of interest and power. He is moreover realistic and discriminating in his appreciation of the proper objects of ambition: it is connected to the realities of power, rather than the mere name. Arran, on the other hand, is distinguished by the absence of ambition and the possession of the show of power, the office and title. Arran is essentially a private rather than a political man:

> The character of the earl of Arran was, in almost every thing, the reverse of Beatoun's. He was neither infected by ambition, nor inclined to cruelty; the love of ease extinguished the former, the gentleness of his temper preserved him from the latter. Timidity and irresolution were his predominant failing, the one occasioned by his natural constitution, and the other arising from a consciousness that his abilities

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[313] Ibid., p. 178.

[314] They did serve to set up, as Jeffrey Smitten has pointed out, one of Robertson's principal narrative techniques in the *History of Scotland*, his use of 'yoked pairs of opposites' to create a pattern of 'ironic character contrast'. 'Robertson's History of Scotland: Narrative Structure and the Sense of Reality', Clio 11 (1981), pp. 29-47.

> were not equal to his station. With these dispositions he might have enjoyed and adorned private life; but his public conduct was without courage, or dignity, or consistence; the perpetual slave of his own fears, and, by consequence, of the perpetual tool of those who found their advantage in practising upon them.[315]

Arran, says Robertson, is not *infected* by ambition, but he is certainly infested with its effects. Arran fits the typical profile of a regent of Scotland: weak, inconsequential, and a pawn in the hands of faction. In one sense, Robertson uses both Beatoun and Arran to dramatise the dysfunctional state of Scottish politics from the outset of Mary's reign: Beatoun's mastery of the world of political motives is unstable, since it is incapable of responding to the religious developments of the age in a manner which would enable him to maintain power. Beatoun's failure of prudence, built into Robertson's initial character of him, makes his regime unsustainable. This is because of the nature of his "immoderate ambition", which is too prone to lead him into passionate excess:

> Cardinal Beatoun had not used his power with moderation, equal to the prudence by which he attained it. Notwithstanding his great abilities, he had too many of the passions and prejudices of an angry leader of a faction, to govern a divided people with temper. His resentment against one party of the nobility, his insolence towards the rest...[316]

There are fissures in his political character which prevent him from separating his passions from the careful and close calculation of his interest. From the beginning therefore, and

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[315] HS, I, p. 100.
[316] HS, I, p. 117.

without dwelling too greatly upon Beatoun's abilities, Robertson emphasises the extent to which his political dexterity was betrayed and rendered nugatory by his insolence, and by his "precipitancy, violence and rigour" on points of religion which his entirely secular and political nature prevented him from comprehending. His passions made him a prisoner of faction, and so he died the death of an ambitious faction leader, whose ambition was the cause of his downfall: "an ambitious man, whose pride was insupportable to the nobles, as his cruelty and cunning were great checks to the reformation".[317] It is central to the theme of Robertson's history, moreover, that Beatoun falls victim to "private revenge, inflamed and sanctified by false zeal for religion", and to the pernicious Scottish disease of assassination. Resentment conquers all other principles of action, and draws strength from the religious disputes that are the new factor in the equation.[318]

The History of Scotland, by and large, is the story of thwarted and disappointed ambition: from Beatoun to Mary of Guise, Darnley, Bothwell, Stewart and Gowrie, it is a tale of the slippage of ambition into imprudence, resentment and ultimate defeat. Murray, a possible exception to this paradigm, himself falls victim to another's passionate resentment. Resentment, in the end, triumphs over any form of ambition. The two alternatives posited in the form of Beatoun or Arran remain equally futile, and equally incapable of changing the fundamental characteristics of Scottish political life. The *History of Scotland* depicts the political sphere as a vicious lust for power and domination; and it is also a picture of ambition in a primitive and unrefined form, not contained and controlled by interest but slipping always into resentment and other private and self-destructive passions.

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[317] HS, I, p. 118.
[318] HS, I, p. 117.

Mary of Guise in part and for a time exemplifies the correct working of ambition and political interest. She is the first great and undeniably brilliant political character whom Robertson encounters, and his admiration for her is pervasive:

> No princess ever possessed qualities more capable of rendering her administration illustrious, or the kingdom happy. Of much discernment, and no less address,; of great intrepidity and equal prudence; gentle and humane, without weakness; zealous for her religion, without bigotry; a lover of justice, without rigour.[319]

Robertson's sympathetic portrayal of Mary of Guise is no doubt related to her instrumental role in fostering the Reformation.[320] She is also useful for Robertson because she connects the "vast and unbounded" ambition, turbulent and passionate, of her brothers with the political skills and arts necessary to control and direct it. Robertson emphasises that she is no less ambitious than the princes of Lorrain, but that as a woman, and as perfect representation of the French courtier culture from which she comes, she is able to soften and thereby diversify the arts of her brothers:

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[319] HS, I, pp. 237-8.

[320] Mary of Guise was an ambiguous figure for Protestant writers on the Scottish Reformation, since she undoubtedly contributed much to the success of the Reformation. The *Monthly Review* detected in Robertson's character of Mary a fatal inconsistency: "Here impartiality obliges us to observe, that the particulars seem to contradict the general character here ascribed to her". His defence of her character was adjudged to be weak: "The eye of man can judge only from appearances; & tho' in particular cases it may be able to separate the motive from the deed, yet a long perseverance in evil measures affords a strong assumption that the heart is a stranger to virtue". Nonetheless, John Pinkerton praised Robertson' portrait of Mary: "an eminent historian has delineated her character with his usual ability": Iconographia Scotica or Portraits of Illustrious Persons of Scotland (London, 1797), unpaginated.

> Mary of Guise possessed the same bold and aspiring spirit which distinguished her family. But in her it was softened by the female character, and accompanied with great temper and address. Her brothers, in order to attain the high objects at which they aimed, ventured upon such daring measures as suited their great courage. Her designs upon the supreme power were concealed with the utmost care, and advanced by address and refinements more natural to her sex. By a dexterous application of those talents, she had acquired a considerable influence on the councils of a nation hitherto unacquainted with the government of women; and without the smallest right to any share in the administration of affairs, had engrossed the chief direction of them in her hands.[321]

Robertson's sincere admiration for her political skills is not clouded by any illusions as to the ultimate tendency of her arts: he was aware that, given the right circumstances, the progress of reformation might have been choked by Mary of Guises's conciliatory measures, by cutting it off from the sources of its strength, the zeal and ardour provoked by opposition. Nonetheless, Robertson praises Mary as a principle of order amidst the prevailing chaos, and her control of the elements with which she comes into contact makes her an almost singular figure in the *History of Scotland*, rivalled only perhaps by the ambiguous figure of Murray. Her success is all the more remarkable considering the apparent imprudence and impracticability of her attempt to gain power amongst a strange, wild and factious people:

[321] HS, I, p. 139.

> Thus, with their own approbation, a woman and a stranger was advanced to the supreme authority over a fierce and turbulent people, who seldom submitted, without reluctance, to the legal and ancient government of their native monarchs.[322]

Her capacity for inserting herself into the political fabric of Scotland, and for creating a viable role for herself out of nothing, is prodigious and unprecedented. Mary passes the most important test of any ruler of Scotland: her ability to employ the inescapable forces of zeal and resentment to her own advantage, and to advance her schemes without "exciting high and dangerous passions". She is capable of working upon the Scottish nobility in such a way as to dress the demands of the French in "a less offensive garb", and to bypass or redirect their resentment away from herself and the crown.[323] In this way, she is a master of the manipulation of appearances, and of the subtle inflections of role-play.

Mary is set in constant contrast to her precipitate and inflexible brothers, themselves the products of a political world remarkably similar to that of the Scots, but incapable of learning from it. She sets herself in opposition to their "violent and impolitic" schemes, which could only succeed in bringing down on their head the destructive violence of the passions which she had hitherto averted:

> ...that humane and sagacious princess condemned a measure which was equally violent and impolitic... What then could be gained by rousing this dangerous spirit, which hitherto all the arts of policy had scarcely been able to restrain?[324]

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[322] HS, I, p. 144; p. 140: it appeared to be a "wild and chimerical project".
[323] HS, I, p. 169.
[324] HS, I, p. 180.

Robertson uses the traditional devices of characterisation to emphasise Mary's achievement of a perfect balance, between force and manipulation, ambition and prudence, and between her own slender and precarious authority, and the volatile situation which she seeks to contain. However, not even Mary of Guise can prevent the resentment of the nobles from breaking out in violence.[325]

In many ways, Mary of Guise provides a pattern for her daughter, both usable and admonitory. In her early political management, her successful adaptation to the situation in which she is placed, she provides a model which Mary Stuart, had she been more experienced or able, might have been able to emulate. Yet, typically, Guise's career ends also in the sacrifice of prudence to a turbulent and assuming ambition. In writing of the abrupt shift in Mary of Guise's political conduct, Robertson would find it easy enough to assimilate it into his general depiction of Scottish history, which was characterised by sudden and capricious shifts in allegiance and partisan affiliation:

> ...during that turbulent period, the conduct of individuals, as well as the principles of factions, varied so often, that the sense of *honour*, a chief preservative of consistence in *character*, was entirely lost; and, without any regard to decorum, men suddenly abandoned one party, and adopted all the violent passions of the other. [326]

Disjunction and discontinuity provide indeed the only structure of the age: "changes in administration, which, among polished nations, are brought about slowly and silently, by

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[325] HS, I, p. 162.

artifice and intrigue, were in that rude age effected suddenly and by violence".[327] Under the dominion of passions, actions became capricious and irregular, and events bewilderingly rapid and inconstant: more than that, they become visible, incapable of effective disguise. Guise's sudden abandonment of prudence was, as we have seen in the cases of James V and Beatoun, a not uncommon pattern to follow. Robertson however is determined to preserve her essential consistency as a political character, if not as a political actor. He censures those glib historians who ascribe the alteration in her policy to the usual effects of prosperity on the mind, although he himself had previously asserted that her elevation to the office of regent had transported her beyond the bounds of her usual prudence and moderation.[328] Rather, her change in political system is the product of external pressures from the uncontrollable and encroaching ambition of her brothers. Her filial duty, her willingness to sacrifice her own ambition and interests to the demands of the "princes of Lorrain", is described by Robertson as the result of her amiability as a woman, the facility of her nature, and therefore the "excess of a virtue". Thus, the consistency and autonomy of Mary's political character is affirmed, while her status as a political actor is reduced to that of being a mere 'instrument' in the hands of the Duke and the Cardinal. Mary is at no point blinded by passion, she never fails to perceive her interests and the correct way of achieving them, and Robertson portrays her as a conflicted figure, torn between her sagacity and her subordination to the ambition of her brothers:

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[326] HS, II, p. 22 Author's italics.
[327] HS, II, p. 94.
[328] HS, I, pp. 176-177; p. 158.

> ...she became the instrument of exciting civil commotions in Scotland, the fatal termination of which she foresaw and dreaded.[329]

Mary retains her independence of political analysis and foresight, but not of action. Her transition from masterful actor to the pliant instrument of a flawed policy is almost tragic, as she embodies in her own fate the sacrifice of calculating interest and cautious prudence to wayward ambition. She also illustrates the irony that it was Scotland's isolation from the patterns of European ambition that had kept it in such primitive turmoil, and yet it was the subordination of Scotland to the interests of France that prevented Mary from breaking Scotland free of this pattern. Nonetheless, Robertson leaves it open to judgement as to whether the arts of Mary could have formed the basis of sustainable long-term policy. In some ways, they seem have a limited life, and cannot be repeated too often: "her wonted artifices were now of no avail; repeated so often, they could deceive no longer". Dissimulation cannot be sustained.[330]

Murray is a far more structurally central character than Mary of Guise: his period of power and authority straddles the central portions of the narrative, and Robertson places his death with full funereal panoply at the end of Book V. To a greater degree than Mary of Guise, he unites the forces of action and enterprise with those of restraint and order. He is a more active figure than Mary, masculine force to her feminine deceit, and to a greater extent implicated in the factionalism and turbulence of Scottish politics. Yet he is also capable of prudence:

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[329] HS, I, pp. 180-181.

> ...his enterprising genius called him forth to act a principal part on a more public and conspicuous theatre. The scene in which he appeared required talents of different kinds: military virtue, and political discernment were equally necessary in order to render him illustrious. These he possessed in eminent degree. To the most unquestionable personal bravery, he added great skill in the art of war, and in every enterprise his arms were crowned with success. His sagacity and penetration in civil affairs enabled him, amidst the reeling and turbulence of factions, to hold a prosperous course; while his boldness in defence of the Reformation, together with the decency, and even severity, of his manners, secured him the reputation of being sincerely attached to religion, without which it was impossible in that age to gain an ascendant over mankind.[331]

It is Robertson's purpose to present Murray not merely as an ambitious faction leader, as the pro-Marian historians would have the reader believe, while adjusting the panegyric that Buchanan had written of his patron.[332] Thus, William Tytler, in his response to Robertson's history, acknowledged Murray's abilities, seeing him as an "intrepid, ambitious, penetrating genius", but unlike Robertson was unwilling to grant that these qualities could be made to serve an honourable and noble cause, such as the establishment of order and justice in Scotland. He is in Tytler's account a *grand-guignol* figure, an arch-hypocrite, a "Maciavel in politics", using religion in order to mask the "black designs which lay at the heart of this bastard-brother of the Queen", and a man urged to commit the most enormous crimes by his

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[330] HS, I, p. 193.
[331] HS, I, pp. 205-206.
[332] For a refutation of Buchanan, see Thomas Innes, A Critical Essay on the Ancient Institutions of the Northern Parts of Britain or Scotland [1729](Edinburgh, 1879), II, esp. pp. 177-202 'On George Buchanan's History'. Charles Mackie's whiggish political views perhaps led him to dismiss Innes' work: "strange materials, I conceive, for a history": 'Dissertation', EUL MS. La. II. 37, f. 6.

"inordinate love of power and ambition".[333] John Whitaker integrated him into the "turbulent activity" of the age, and envisaged him as a bold and assuming figure intent upon breaking through every restraint, yet seeking vainly to hide his actions in the "mazes" and "labyrinths" of artifice. There is no balance between these different principles: they are merely different and diverse ways of pursuing his criminal ends.[334] Robertson however sees Murray as a man of wisdom and moderation, who combines harmoniously the two key qualities of "vigour and prudence". One of the reasons why Robertson identifies so closely with Murray is that he represented in the narrative an ideal of order tempered by moderation and restraint. His first appearance sees him as the mainspring of the Protestant party, the man who 'moves and actuates the whole body', and provides the core of its action as a united force. He is, in Robertson's presentation, an anti-passionate character: his first role is as a force of restraint upon the violence and impetuosity of the zeal of the Protestants against popery.[335] He also more literally represents the forces of authority and order in the campaign to restrain the license of the borderers: and in his success, and the vigour and prudence with which he effected the task, Murray may well have laid the foundations of a more modern and stable political entity.[336]

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[333] William Tytler, An Inquiry, Historical and Critical, into the Evidence against Mary Queen of Scots and an Examination of the Histories of Dr Robertson and Mr Hume, with respect to that evidence (Edinburgh, 1790), I, pp. 342, 351, 371, 381.

[334] John Whitaker, Mary Queen of Scots Vindicated (London, 1790), pp. 33-36. In Gilbert Stuart's History of Scotland (Edinburgh 1783), Murray is a creature of criminal revenge, ambition and violent and turbulent passions: see I, pp. 89-96, and Stuart uses Murray's character as substantive proof of his conspiracy against the Queen.

[335] HS, I, p. 278: Robertson's claim that "it is impossible, at this distance of time, and under circumstances is very different, to conceive the violence of that zeal against popery, which then possessed the nation" may well have been modified somewhat by Robertson's own experiences of anti-Catholic bigotry in 1780, and by the national trauma of the Gordon riots. It may have sharpened his sense of the difficulty of Murray's task. See Robert Kent Donovan, No Popery and Radicalism: Opposition to Roman Catholic Relief in Scotland 1778-1782 (London, 1987). See the 'incendiary' letters that Robertson received as a result of his support of Catholic relief: NLS MS 3943

[336] HS, I, p. 284.

The opposition which Robertson posits between Murray and the more unstable and passionate characters of the narrative enables him to represent the superiority of Murray's forceful and active prudence to the chaotic and ill-concerted energy of Bothwell or Huntly. The conflict between Murray and Huntly is the clearest example of a conflict between the forces of order and those of resentment and "private revenge", and Murray's "steady courage and prudent conduct" amidst the furious fermentation of passions that Robertson describes in some detail are clearly seen to triumph over the impotent and sudden spasms of resentment displayed by Huntly. This struggle presents in microcosm the central dilemma of the Scottish monarchy: how to combat the powerful and disruptive passions of the nobility. Yet Murray's victory is only partial and fortuitous: the feebleness of Huntly's conduct stems not from the essential weakness of his passionate nature, but from the inactive and sluggish temper of his family. [337] Allied with a powerful and overmastering ambition, or a fixed and resolute purpose, resentment can conquer all, if only for a time. Murray himself falls victim to the resentment of Mary Stuart, his half-sister, and is obliged to retreat from Scotland.

Murray is clearly contrasted with Mary Stuart: the 'severity' of manners that he manifests is set starkly in opposition to her profligate and spontaneous ebullitions of emotion. Murray is also a stranger to the gentle and manipulative courtier arts of Mary of Guise, or of a moderate and flexible character such as Maitland of Lethington. Although, Robertson emphasises, his abilities were great, he

> ...did not possess the talents requisite for soothing the rage or removing the jealousies of different factions. By insinuation, or address, he might have gained or softened many who had opposed him; but he was a stranger to these gentle arts. His virtues were severe...[338]

Murray is less adept at the theatrics of power than it would seem: his range is limited, and his sphere of action more closely confined to the exertion of military and political force. He is as a result less likely to fall into the errors of facility and amiability that had been the downfall of Mary of Guise. In a way, Murray is, as his detractors claimed, a product of the factious and violent political world in which he was reared, and he is incapable of moving outside its realm of experiences in order to effect a reconciliation between the contending parties. The language of force and dominion is the only one that he understands, and thus his great talents of penetration are inherently limited in their effect. His severity, his immunity from cripplingly fickle passions, is a rational response to his circumstances: it lends him a reputation for inflexibility and for religion that prove to be inestimable political assets in an uncertain political environment, and grants him a strength of purposive action that few others can match. It, as much as his abilities of strategic calculation, is the principal reason for his success. Yet it cannot bring about an end to the cycle of violence which he can only perpetuate. Murray therefore only imperfectly exemplifies the development of new forms of political action: he proves incapable of mastering those more sinuous forms of manipulation and control that need to be allied with the exertion of force. Robertson is therefore able to present him as an antidote to the corrupt and corrupting French 'courtier' culture: the gentleness of Mary Stuart is too clearly porous, and spills over into more criminal and

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[337] HS, I, pp. 295-302.

licentious actions. Murray is a more stoic character, in the awful sense of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Although in a number of ways Murray proves to be a character beyond the common conceptions of the age and place, in his liberality and his "disinterested passion" for the liberty of his country, and was capable of moderation and humanity, as a result of his elevation to power he is not free from passions,. Murray's character indeed slips into a familiar pattern:

> His moral qualities are more dubious, and ought neither to be praised nor censured without great reserve and many distinctions.
>
> ...his ambition was immoderate; and events happened that opened him to vast projects, which allured his enterprising genius, and led him to actions inconsistent with the duty of a subject...His elevation to such unexpected dignity inspired him with new passions, with haughtiness and reserve; and instead of his natural manner, which was blunt and open, he affected the arts of dissimulation and refinement.

Murray's trajectory is both typical and depressing, and argues little for the possibility of his sustaining the order and justice that he had erected. The problem lies at the heart of the Scottish political order: if the monarch cannot impose order, then a subject doing so causes simply more factionalism and disorder. Yet even before Murray himself could unravel what he had created, he is struck down by a random act of private resentment that it is impossible for his sagacity to foresee or prepare for. He is ultimately destroyed by the same forces that he had so masterfully but contingently overridden in the conflict against Huntly. Even the

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[338] HS, I, pp. 467-468.

familiar course of corruption cannot take its full course in Scotland before being struck down by the irregular operation of private passions.

The rise of the subject to supreme power cannot be maintained, since such examples of successful ambition, as we have seen, merely stimulate the forces that prevent authority from perpetuating itself: the spiral of emulation that keeps the Scottish polity in a state of continual flux. This transition is exemplified most clearly and rapidly in the case of Morton, who appears in the text as a lesser type of Murray. Morton's character is simpler than that of Murray: lacking the exceptional virtues that rescued Murray's character from infamy, he embodies and displays the spectacle of disappointed ambition that is the pattern of all pretenders to authority. Morton possesses Murray's abilities without Murray's severe self-control. As we have seen, power was beginning to deprive Murray of those qualities that distinguished him from Morton; Morton's fate underlines the lesson that overreaching ambition will necessarily fall victim to the operation of resentment, even without the accidental intervention of a lone assassin. Morton's power and "profound sagacity", moreover, are nakedly placed at the service of a faction: as Robertson claims, the fall of Morton is the fall of Morton's faction. Morton's transition from factious noble to regent is particularly difficult:

> The public confusions and calamities, to which he owed his power and importance when he was only the second person in the nation, were extremely detrimental to him, now that he was raised to be the first. While so many of the nobles continued in arms against him, his authority as regent was partial, feeble and precarious.[339]

[339] HS, II, p. 45.

The irony inherent in this situation is obvious: the supreme power is in fact less desirable than the freedom to disrupt it at will. Robertson emphasises the disjunction of Morton's movement from factious leader to legitimate source of authority by compressing the period of his regency into relatively few pages, emphasising the inevitability of the events that caused his fall. Unable to divorce himself from the factional struggles in which he is immersed, and from his own sordid and base passions such as avarice, his period of rule becomes merely an instrument of personal and factional aggrandisement.[340] Although, like Murray, through his vigour he restores order and security to Scotland, he imposes upon the Scots "refinements in oppression, from which nations so imperfectly polished as the Scots are usually exempted". As Robertson claims, "Morton had governed with a rigour unknown to the ancient monarchs of Scotland".[341] Such a regime is inherently unstable, lacks legitimate sanction, and cannot stave off the passions of resentment which it arouses. Morton, again, falls victim to a conjunction of resentment and ambition.[342] Robertson chooses to dramatise in the fall of Morton the spectacle of "disappointed ambition".[343]

Zeal and Love: The Downfall of Mary Stuart

In constructing the narrative of *The History of Scotland*, the greatest problem that Robertson faced was the intrusive character of Mary Stuart. As Alexander Bower complained, the obsessive concern with Mary evinced by antiquarians and polemicists was the product of

[340] HS, II, pp. 55-56.
[341] HS, II, p. 61.
[342] HS, II, Ibid.: "Their resentment concurred with the ambition of others, in infusing into the king early suspicions of Morton's power and designs".

faction, and disfigured the histories written of Scotland in that age by forcing historians to consider events fundamentally trivial in themselves. From this infection, Robertson was not and indeed could not be an exception, so intertwined with the events of the age had the dispute over her character become. [344] Dugald Stewart made a similar point, conceding the interest that the character of Mary would arouse in the readership as a legitimate reason for including her, but wary of the consequences:

> ...the story of the beautiful and unfortunate queen, as related by him, excites on the whole a deeper interest in her fortunes, & a more lively sympathy with her fate, than have been produced by all the attempts to canonize her memory...it leads to no general conclusion concerning human affairs, nor throws any light on human character...it was only by the romantic pictures which her name presents to the fancy, that he could accommodate to the refinement of modern taste, the annals of a period, where perfidy, cruelty & bigotry, appear in all their horrors; unembellished by those attractions which, in other states of society, they have so often assumed...[345]

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[343] HS, II, pp. 64-65: "His mind was deeply disquieted with all the uneasy reflections which accompany disappointed ambition".

[344] Alexander Bower, History of the University of Edinburgh , III (Edinburgh, 1830), p. 77: "The events which respect Mary's personal history are of comparatively little importance. How interesting soever a character she may have been, and how diversified soever her lot was, these circumstances can only be considered as of great importance as they stand related to the origin, progress and accomplishment of the glorious work of Reformation of religion in Scotland...Thus while her beauty and other accomplishments might have been but secondary objects of attention...the connection which her history has with the Reformation has insensibly drawn those who have engaged in the controversy, to the discussion of particular facts regarding her life which would otherwise have excited little or no controversy".

[345] Stewart, 'Account', MWC, pp. 119-121. George Gleig echoed Stewart's sentiment: "Antiquaries and Divines might have been led by duty and curiosity to trace the ...the events which led to the change of religion in Scotland; but nothing short of the interesting character of Mary, acting a part in the drama, could have engaged the attention of every reader to the plots and dark deeds of barbarians":

For Stewart, despite the function which it performed of lending the squalid events of the age some semblance of dignity and importance, in essence it was a distracting side-show. Stewart's rather scholarly disdain for the populist implications of Robertson's narrative was rooted in the appreciation that Stewart had of Robertson as a pre-eminently political historian. For Stewart, Robertson's descent into the realm of the private and 'romantic' was an aberration, forced upon him by the nature of the materials from which he was compiling his history, and also by the nature of the readership to whom he was appealing. Robertson's determination to uncover the 'private' world of princes, the little passions by which they were actuated, came in a pronouncement in Book III of Scotland, in which he sought to reduce the conflict between Mary and Elizabeth from the realm of political interests, in which it was to be sure securely rooted, to the more petty and trivial circumstance of feminine vanity:

> But though considerations of interest first occasioned this rupture between the British queens, rivalship of another kind contributed to widen the breach, and female jealousy increased the violence of their political hatred...
>
> In judging of the conduct of princes, we are apt to ascribe too much to political motives, and too little to the passions which they feel with the rest of mankind.[346]

Despite this latter statement, it was undoubtedly the gender of Mary and Elizabeth that prompted this reduction of their political characters to the status of "merely" women.[347] It

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'Some Account of the Life and Writings of William Robertson', in Works of William Robertson (Edinburgh, 1819), I, p. xxxvi.

[346] HS, I, pp. 270-271.

was Robertson's perceived mastery of this private world of non-political motives that had led Hume and Lyttelton to attempt to persuade him to devote his career to the penetration of such private circumstances and characters. Yet, as Stewart identified, this was beside Robertson's essential purpose as a historian. Gilbert Stuart, Robertson's most vicious critic, went further and claimed to see the entire history subordinated to Robertson's character of Mary:

> He selects those portions of the Scottish History which he can adorn, but does not place the whole before the eye. He hastens over every part of his subject, except where Mary is concerned, & by this means gives his work the appearance of a historical novel.[348]

The deliberate foregrounding of Mary therefore threatened to undermine the meaning of the history. However, few took Gilbert Stuart's line that Robertson had turned his history solely into a meditation upon Mary. Rather, the problem for Robertson, in opposition to Stuart's own history of Mary, lay in the marginalisation of Mary: her disappearance from the latter half of the narrative.[349] Her death is not even used as a structural crux, but is rather a digressive interlude in the main theme of the later part of the narrative, the strained relationship between Elizabeth and James VI. Even before she is gently elided from the narrative, Karen O'Brien has argued that Robertson's entire presentation of Mary is designed

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[347] On Hume's depiction of Elizabeth and Mary, see Annette C. Beier, 'Hume on Women's Complexion', in Peter Jones (ed.), The Science of Man in the Scottish Enlightenment: Hume, Reid and their Contemporaries (Edinburgh University Press, 1989), pp. 33-53.

[348] Stuart, Critical Observations, p. 37. Stuart delights in contradicting the general opinion of Robertson's work. Thus, in flat contradiction of the Monthly Review, he claims that Robertson "never penetrates the veil of courts, nor removes the trappings state. He relates public transactions without giving a picture of the times in which they happened; nor can we discover, from his History, that the manners of the Scottish nation, in the sixteenth century, were different from those of the present": Ibid.

[349] See Gilbert Stuart, History of Scotland Until the Death of Queen Mary (London, 1783).

to marginalise her politically. She is increasingly divorced from the mainsprings of political action, and especially from its language: instead, she is located in a language of novelistic sentiment.[350] Nevertheless, the character of Mary did operate within the narrative to connect a number of key themes. As Thomas Robertson, the author of a popular *History of Mary Queen of Scots* (1793), pointed out, the importance of Mary's character lay in the fact that it "involved the state of Religion; the views of Princes; the general manners of the age; the characters of almost every person then in power in the island", quite apart from those more personal and affecting features of her character. In particular, her character needed to be read in opposition to the society in which she was compelled to act: she represented "polish and politeness" in a society characterised by violence and resentment.[351]

Mary's reign exemplifies the slippage of qualities that Robertson had already identified in the character of her father. Mary's conduct on her arrival in Scotland is initially and surprisingly prudent and skilful, despite her youth, inexperience and sex, and despite also the enormity of the problems which she faces in the "pure state of anarchy" that Scotland has become since the death of her mother: "never did any prince ascend the throne at a juncture which called for more wisdom in council, or more courage and steadiness in action".

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[350] O'Brien, Narratives of Enlightenment, pp. 115-122. On the sentimental and affective dimensions of eighteenth century historical narrative, see J. C. Hilson, 'Hume: the Historian as Man of Feeling', in Hilson, J.C., Jones, M.M.B., and Watson, J.R., (eds.), Augustan Worlds (Leicester University Press, 1978), pp . 205-222. On the specific use of Mary, see also Laurence L. Bongie, 'The Eighteenth Century Marian Controversy', Studies in Scottish Literature 1 (1963-4). Antonia Fraser, 'Mary Queen of Scots and the Historians', Royal Stuart Papers VII (1974). Of course, the literary possibilities of Mary Stuart's story were evident to all, especially dramatists. Amongst those whom Robertson inspired were John St. John, Mary Queen of Scots; A Tragedy [1789] (Boston, 1820). , and of course Schiller's *Maria Stuart*. On Schiller's response to Robertson's depiction of Mary, William White, 'The Scottish Influence on Schiller', in Schiller and Burns, and other Essays (Oxford, 1959), pp.33-4. See also Pearl J. Brandwein, Mary Queen of Scots in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Drama: Poetic License with History (New York, 1989), pp. 164-70.

[351] Thomas Robertson, History of Mary Queen of Scots (Edinburgh, 1793), pp. x-xi; p. 85.

Robertson dramatises Mary's essential isolation in a political world completely alien to her experience: she is "unacquainted with the manners and laws of her country, a stranger to her subjects, without experience, without allies, and almost without a friend".[352] Yet Mary's early conduct is both effective and well-measured, designed as it is to work within the constraints of her situation. Mary's ambition finds no outlet in Scotland: sensibly, her aim is simply to maintain her position, and to fix her attention upon the eventual prize of England, which is the one circumstance, as Robertson goes on to show, that can alter irreparably the vicious circle of Scottish history. Even there, Mary is schooled to adapt herself to the weakness of her position: adopting a "prudent reserve" she studies to hide from Elizabeth the "secret sentiments of her heart", and to match Elizabeth in the mutual game of dissimulation which they play upon each other. Indeed, Mary understands the importance of sacrificing her distant ambition in order to avoid arousing the resentment of Elizabeth.[353] She shows herself to be adept at the art of defusing resentment in others, a necessary acquirement in the unstable and volatile conditions of Scotland. At the same time, Mary consolidates her position in Scotland through the engine of the court, employing the refinement, elegance and politeness that is natural to her, and which is the legacy that she brings with her from the French court. Using the only tools at her disposal to maximum effect, Robertson hints that Mary is almost, but not quite, capable of altering from within the entire pattern of Scottish history:

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[352] HS, I, pp. 275-276.

[353] HS, I, pp. 310-311: the throne of England is "the great object of her wishes and ambition", yet she could not "without manifest imprudence" offend Elizabeth. "For these reasons Mary laid aside, at that time, all thoughts of foreign alliance, and seemed willing to sacrifice her own ambition, in order to remove the jealousies of Elizabeth, and to quiet the fears of her own subjects".

> The gentleness of the queen's administration, and the elegance of her court, had mitigated, in some degree, the ferocity of the nobles, and accustomed them to greater mildness and humanity; while, at the same time, her presence and authority were a check to their factious and tumultuary spirit. But as a state of order and tranquillity was not natural to the feudal aristocracy, it could not be of long continuance... [354]

Despite the inevitable recurrence of civil strife, and the return of the unrefined and unrestrained resentment as the dominant fact of Scottish political life, Mary's reign is characterised by a limited but promising success. Mary is shrewd enough to rest her authority upon the "prudent advice" of Murray and Maitland, and to tolerate, like her mother, Protestantism from "political motives", while also offering the nation the possibility of her future conversion.[355]

Book III ends with Mary at the height of her prosperity, and indeed even taking on the role of general, transforming her defensive prudence into active ardour and 'vigour':

> ...Mary's vigilance hindered them from assembling in any considerable body. All her military operations at that time were conducted with wisdom, executed with vigour, and attended with success. In order to encourage her troops, she herself marched along with them, rode with loaded pistols, and endured all the fatigues of war with admirable fortitude. Her alacrity inspired her forces with an invincible resolution..[356]

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[354] HS, I, p. 292.
[355] HS, I, pp. 312-313.
[356] HS, I, p. 350.

Her beauty, grace and accomplishments, which Stewart and Bower dismiss as merely trifling details, are seen by Robertson as essential political tools, although the only ones at her command, which she disposes with skill and prudence. As Robertson claimed, although somewhat implausibly, from the early indications of Mary's rule "a political observer would have predicted a very different issue of her reign; and whatever sudden gusts of faction he might have expected, he would never have dreaded the destructive violence of that violence that followed".[357] Nonetheless, the limitations of Mary's beneficial influence upon the nobility are quickly asserted.:

> But, as a state of order and tranquillity was not natural to the feudal aristocracy, it could not be of long continuance; and this year [1562] became remarkable for the most violent eruptions of intestine discord and animosity.[358]

As well as illustrating the weaknesses of political prediction and analysis, this statement makes it clear that the explanation for the collapse of her regime lies outside the normal conditions of the Scottish political pattern. Mary possesses all of the necessary qualities of prudence, and moreover the capacity to learn, that should have ensured the survival, if not the outright prosperity of the Marian monarchy. Crucial is the fact that Mary does not seek to encroach upon the rights of the nobility: she does not possess, from a realistic appraisal of her situation, this destabilising desire. Thus, unlike her father, the degeneration of her prudence comes not through disappointed ambition, but from principles altogether more mysterious and unaccountable: the incalculable effects of religious zeal, and romantic love.

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[357] HS, I, p. 277.

The eternal theme of Scottish history, the disruption of the public sphere by private resentment, is in the sixteenth century mixed with, and made more potent by, a combustible new ingredient, the *zeal* of religious fanaticism. Zeal is one of Robertson's favourite terms, a chameleonic principle of action that can attach itself to and energise such diverse concepts as national independence, love of liberty, religious truth, and false religion. Robertson is able to modulate his use of 'zeal' in order to speak of, for instance, the "noble and disinterested zeal" of Luther, while on another occasion employing it in a Swiftian sense, to denote a dangerous and uncontrollable spasm of the mind.[359] The success of Robertson's account of the reformation is perhaps in large part due to his insistent deployment of this ambiguous term 'zeal' in order to characterise the Scottish reformers, occasionally used pejoratively, and associated with torrential violence, yet also capable of connecting their actions with disinterest, integrity and inflexible adherence to truth: their zeal, if sometimes excessive, is nonetheless "merited".[360] In the context of sixteenth-century Scotland, zeal lends an almost superhuman quality to the activity and firmness of Knox and Melville. It also prevents Mary from using her arts to effect a permanent reconcilement between the crown and the Protestant clergy. While Mary strives to accommodate herself to the reformation, the Protestant clergy themselves disregard the normal rules of policy, prudence, decency or decorum in their dealings with her. Robertson is surprisingly critical of their strident militancy:

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[358] HS, I, p. 292.

[359] Swift's satirical use of the term 'zeal' is widely known, but the precise modulations of meaning that it possessed for eighteenth century writers, and especially historians, has received much less attention than such terms as enthusiasm or fanaticism. See for example, John Passmore, 'Enthusiasm, Fanaticism, and David Hume', in Jones, Peter, (ed.), The Science of Man in the Scottish Enlightenment: Hume, Reid and their Contemporaries (Edinburgh university Press, 1989), pp. 85-107.

> The zeal of the Protestant clergy was deaf to all these considerations of prudence or policy. Eager and impatient, it brooked no delay: severe and inflexible, it would condescend to no compliances.[361]

Once again we see how, like ambition or resentment, zeal takes possession of those who feel it, and wrests from them their agency in the actions that follow. Robertson thus establishes early on how ineffective the cold principles of policy and prudence would be against such fanatical and zealous reformers. Zeal also moved considerations of the nature of the reformation outside the usual assessments of historiography. As Thomas McCrie was later to write, against those historians who represented Knox as a brutal savage, it was a sign of Knox's superior wisdom to disregard the "ordinary dictates of prudence", the ardour of his zeal making good any deficit incurred: "extraordinary cases cannot be measured by ordinary rules".[362] Zeal therefore seemed to locate the reformation beyond the bounds of political history. Yet this is precisely what Robertson was attempting to deny: while claiming that the reformation could be written entirely in religious terms, he nonetheless wished to assert his ability to treat it in entirely political terms, and thus rescue it from those sceptics who perverted it into a mere pathology: "the Reformation having been represented as the effect of some wild and enthusiastic frenzy in the human mind". He wished to locate the force of its zeal as explicable in secular terms. In this way, however, zeal was conflated with resentment, avarice, and integrated into the pattern of Scottish history that saw the nobility triumph over all. The ultimate effect of reforming zeal is to turn the reformers into the handmaidens of

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[360] HS, I, p. 157.
[361] HS, I, p. 313.
[362] Thomas McCrie, The Life of John Knox, containing illustrations of the history of the Reformation in Scotland with Biographical Notices of the Principal Reformers, and Sketches of the Progress of Literature in Scotland (Edinburgh, 1844), pp. 132-133, p. 142.

aristocratic power. The Reformation served to render the normal conditions of prudence even less applicable to the situation of Scotland, and to make any mistakes committed by the queen even more irreparable: in short, to destabilise an already dangerously volatile situation. In this way, the manifestations of zeal become further symptoms of the pre-modernity of Scottish society: they represent the vehement, unrefined and uncontrolled expressions of religious truth of an earlier stage of society. Thus, Robertson sees the peculiar characteristics of Knox as an instrument of Providence sent amongst barbarous people.[363]

Mary's encounter with the reformers is always likely therefore to be painful. However, the zealous turbulence of Knox is superseded as a causal factor in Mary's downfall by Mary's 'bigoted' attachment to Catholicism. Partly in exculpation of Mary, and perhaps as a somewhat warped plea for toleration, Robertson seeks to explain Mary's imprudent fondness for the Catholic faith by referring it to those principles of Catholicism which were calculated to gain a purchase on the human mind. Mary is thus represented as an unwitting dupe of a highly sophisticated and artful system of false knowledge, and as the blameless product of an inherently corrupt education.[364] Mary's "bigotry" is set in opposition to the zeal of the reformers: a less active, and less ambiguous term, impossible to connect with the higher principles of liberty and religious truth. It is Mary's fatal connection with Catholicism which

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[363] HS, II, pp. 43-44: "Those very qualities, however, which now render his character less amiable, fitted him to be the instrument of Providence for advancing the Reformation among a fierce people". This contextualisation of religious truth was appreciated by Gilbert Elliot, who wrote to Robertson: "I was afraid you might have been embarrassed with the reformation, but I find it much otherwise, you treat it with great propriety & in my opinion with sufficient freedom, no revolution whether civil or religious can be accomplish'd without that degree of ardour & passion, which in a later age will be matter of ridicule to men who dont feel the occasion or enter into the spirit of the times": Elliot to Robertson, 20th January 1759, NLS MS 3942: ff. 5-6. Bishop Warburton expressed his satisfaction at Robertson's apparent love of civil and religious liberty, assuming that it was only for fear of offence that he had not spoken with more freedom of the hierarchical principles of the infant Church of Scotland: A. Millar to Robertson, 27th January 1759, NLS MS 3942, f. 12.

leads her into her first really serious breach of the dictates of prudence: it - "counterbalanced all the prudent considerations which had formerly weighed with her...":

> To this fatal resolution may be imputed all the subsequent calamities of Mary's life. Ever since her return into Scotland, fortune may be said to have been propitious to her, rather than adverse; and if her prosperity did not rise to any great height, it had, however, suffered no considerable interruption. A thick and settled cloud of adversity, with few gleams of hope, and none of real enjoyment, covers the remainder of her days.

The turn in Mary's fortunes is envisaged as a deliberate act, a turning away from prudence, and with the abandonment of prudence comes the loss of the control that secrecy, the ability to keep things hidden, implies. Mary's conduct from hereon in, however apparently inexplicable, is highly visible in its tendencies and meaning: "The effects of the new system which Mary had adopted were soon visible".[365]

Robertson can only write of Mary in terms of disjunction and almost alchemical transformation. Her early prudence collapses due to the pressures of religion, filial duty and perhaps most bewilderingly, love. Robertson's readiness to explain Mary's actions in terms of private emotions led to his being described by William Tytler as a "love-casuist".[366] The insertion of love into Robertson's narrative is the most singular fact of the *History of Scotland*, and took it outside its customary terms of reference. Mary's first love for Darnley

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[364] HS, I, p. 325.
[365] HS, I, p. 360.
[366] Tytler, Ibid., II, pp. 42-43.

is violent, unrestrained and entirely incalculable, and is capable of frustrating all attempts at political prediction. Robertson is forced to refer the reader to the accounts of poets in order to shore up the probability of his narrative:

> But this deep-laid scheme was in a moment disconcerted. Such unexpected events, as the fancy of poets ascribe to love, are sometimes really produced by that passion. An affair which had been the object of so many political intrigues, and had moved and interested so many princes, was at last decided by the sudden liking of two young persons. [367]

For a time, indeed, love contributes to the success of Mary's political schemes: "Love sharpened her invention, and made her study every method of gaining her subjects. many of the nobles she won by her address, and more by her promises".[368] Yet Mary's susceptibility to love, like her weakness for Catholicism, distorts and saps her capacity for political judgement. The speed of her transition from her infatuation with Darnley to that with Bothwell indicates the dangerous nature of love as a basis for action. It provides an inlet for resentment: the rapidity with which her love for Darnley is converted into a concomitant resentment towards Murray causes the most critical breach of her reign, and removes from the court the one stabilising and protective presence upon which she could rely. Her love for Darnley in turn breeds new passions, culminating in a volatile and criminal resentment for him:

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[367] HS, I, p. 328.
[368] HS, I, p. 340.

> Almost all the passions which operate with greatest violence on a female mind, and drive it to the most dangerous extremes, concurred in raising and fomenting this unhappy quarrel...Her resentment against the king seems not to have abated from the time of his leaving Stirling.[369]

As Robertson emphasises, love supplies in its train a host of 'unexpected events': it removes the history from the world of political interest and prediction towards the unaccountable, mysterious and secret.[370] Robertson pretends scepticism: he admonishes Knox and Buchanan for their certainty that Mary was Bothwell's lover: such "delicate transitions of passion can only be discerned by those who are near or are admitted to view secret workings of the heart with calm & acute observation".[371] Nonetheless, Robertson can find no other principle to explain Mary's actions:

> The affection which Mary there [in the casket letters] expresses for Bothwell, fully accounts for every subsequent part of her conduct; which, without admitting this circumstance, appears altogether mysterious, inconsistent, and inexplicable.[372]

However, he makes no claim to penetration of the occult motions of Mary's mind, but refers his belief in Mary's passion for Bothwell to the visible effects of "this reciprocal passion". Indeed, Robertson incorporates the visibility of her actions, and the ease with which her motives can be read off from their obvious tendencies, into the theme of his work. The increasing transparency of Mary's actions and motives is related to their essentially

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[369] HS, I, p. 407.
[370] David Womersley, 'The Historical Writings of William Robertson', Journal of the History of Ideas, 47 (1986), pp. 497-506: pp. 500-502.
[371] HS, I, p. 385.

passionate nature. Thus, while at one level Mary's desire for Bothwell is inexplicable and unaccountable, it is also undeniably present and active. Robertson indeed explains the origin of Mary's dependence upon Bothwell in her isolation and his manipulation of the passions which her situation naturally aroused; yet he cannot account for the strength or durability of this passion. By invoking love, Robertson removes Mary's monumental and stark imprudence from political explanation, and connects it to her "sensibility of temper", "tenderness", and "affection":

> So many steps in her conduct, inconsistent with all the rules of prudence and of decency, must be imputed to an excess either of folly or of love. Mary's known character fully vindicates her from the former; of the latter, many and striking proofs appeared. [373]

However, its most important effect is the total collapse of her mechanism of concealment and theatrical control of appearances, despite her and Bothwell's attempt to cover their actions "under a veil of secrecy of darkness". Mary's increasing contempt for the proprieties of behaviour, for instance towards her husband Darnley, is not accompanied by a determination to mask her feelings. Her attempts at dissimulation, while inherently shameful, are made more unwise by their obvious and unconvincing nature "to those who are acquainted with the human heart".[374] Her inability to assume even the appearance of love for Darnley makes her later dissimulation appear suspicious; Robertson draws attention to her failure to act her part convincingly in surrendering to Bothwell, thus wrecking the whole purpose of the

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[372] HS, I, p. 409.
[373] HS, I, pp. 385-6; p. 415.
[374] HS, I, p. 407.

pantomime.[375] The result of such neglect of appearances is that through a variety of actions Bothwell's ascendant over her heart becomes "more visible than ever": "the absolute dominion which Bothwell had acquired over the Mary's mind appeared in the clearest manner".[376]

The post-Marian narrative revolves around the recurrence of the Scottish pattern of events traced in Book I. The narrative provides no breakthrough for the Scottish monarchy: towards the end of the narrative, and well into the reign of James VI, Robertson declares that

> All the defects in the feudal aristocracy, were now felt more sensibly, perhaps, than at any other period in the history of Scotland, and universal licence and anarchy, prevailed to a degree scarce consistent with the preservation of society: while the king, too gentle to punish, or too feeble to act with vigour, suffered all these enormities to pass with impunity.[377]

The wheel has come full circle, and Robertson implies that this self-destructive cycle will only end with the gradual and painful absorption of Scotland into an unequal partnership with England. Even the growing cosmopolitanism of Scotland, the pull which the European states system exerts on Scotland, gradually narrows into a relationship of tutelage with England: the French and Spanish recede as influences upon the Scottish king, and Scotland's role within the balance of power structure is reduced to the marginal sphere of religious

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[375] HS, I, p. 432: "she expressed neither surprize, nor terror, nor indignation, at such an outrage committed on her person, and such an insult offered to her authority, but seemed to yield without struggle or regret".
[376] HS, I, pp. 421-422.
[377] HS, II, pp. 209-210.

disputation. Robertson appears therefore not to have fulfilled his promise: he has not produced that narrative of great and consequential events that connects Scotland into the great power system, and into the new patterns of political behaviour that have resulted. The ending of the narrative is bathetic: the apparent establishment of royal authority in the person of a young monarch of considerable talents, self-control, and of such devotion to his politic interests that he stifles his resentment over the death of his mother, produces in fact no substantial results.[378] James begins his personal reign with the aim of ending the feuds and reconciling the factions within the nation; yet he becomes a pawn in the power disputes between the nobles, and the principal target of the various conspiracies that plague his reign. He is turned into a passive object the mere possession of whom is crucial, an instrument of the passions and desires of the nobility, and is unable to play the more forceful part required of him. His thirst for reconciliation and mediation leads him into severe blunders: in attempting to assuage the resentment of the nobles he communicates only the weakness of "excessive facility".[379] James' career in Scotland reveals how ineffective the 'arts of policy' are in a context where they are deprived of force and vigour, and a neglect of the true interest of the crown. Indeed, Robertson sees James' kingcraft as altogether too theoretical, lacking practical application, the distortion of political maxims into abstruse science. James' theoretical refinement and dissimulation mark him out as only a pretender to political sagacity.[380] He does not lack insight, but he lacks the steadiness and perseverance to pursue his aims: the failure of his attempt to civilise the Highlanders is proof of the laudable nature

[378] HS, II, p. 186: "All these considerations induced him to stifle his resentment".
[379] For instance, HS, II, p. 222: "By this lenity towards the conspirators, James incurred much reproach, and gained no advantage". "Averse through his whole life , to any course where he expected opposition or danger; and fond of attaining his ends with the character of moderation and by the arts of policy".

of his ends, but the inadequacy of the personal qualities, as well as the physical means, to effect them.[381] Overall, the reign of James, while it settles into a temporary tranquillity, witnesses no essential change in the fundamental nature of Scottish events. The Gowrie conspiracy reveals the tendency of Scottish history to fall into the bizarre and mysterious, divorced from considerations of prudence or interest.[382] It is only with the incorporation of the Scottish crown, and the access of power and wealth, as well as the mystique of distance, that this creates, that the Scottish crown is able to break out of this destructive cycle. It is significant that this crucial development is located outside Scotland, and outside the narrative, indeed over a century after the narrative. Robertson implies that the events of the seventeenth century, a scene of wild chaos lacking even the focus of a nominal authority- are not worthy of a narrative account: the balance that , in a shifting and uncertain way, subsisted between nobles and crown is taken away, the stage is emptied of protagonists, and the events become less regular, even smaller, despite the great passions that incite them:

> ...subjected at once to the absolute will of a monarch, and to the oppressive jurisdiction of an aristocracy, it suffered all the miseries peculiar to both these forms

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[380] HS, II, p. 203: James often aimed at an excessive refinement, mingled with dissimulation, in which he imagined the perfection of government and of kingcraft to consist". It is this which "Has given an air of mystery, and even of contradiction, to the king's character".

[381] Robertson images James as a rather feeble and distracted lawgiver: "Although he did not pursue the design with that steady application and perseverance, without which it is impossible to change the manners of a whole people, he had the glory...of pointing out the method of introducing the civil arts of life into that part of the island": HS, II, pp. 289-290. This of course contrasts with Murray's pacification of the Lowlands.

[382] Robertson was clearly fascinated with the Gowrie conspiracy, as can be seen in his lengthy discussion of the affair, which is designed to reassert the ability of the historian to penetrate the world of motive despite the apparent mystery of the transaction. Thus, Robertson asserts the need to stand back from the affair, to derive it "from a more remote cause", as he had done with Mary of Guise: see HS, II, pp. 270-271.

> of government. Its kings were despotic; its nobles were slaves & tyrants; and the people groaned under the rigorous domination of both.[383]

Moreover, the narrative has registered no progress in the form or the maxims of the constitution. Indeed, at the end of the narrative Robertson claims that the "feudal aristocracy, which had been subverted in most nations of Europe by the policy of their princes, or had been undermined by the progress of commerce, still subsisted with full force in Scotland".[384] The anomalous events of the sixteenth century had merely augmented the power of the nobility, and it takes a similarly anomalous event, the Union of the Crowns, to subvert it. For this reason, the narrative is closed not by the death of a Scottish monarch, but by the long-anticipated demise of the all-conquering figure of Elizabeth.

Conclusion

The project of character evaluation is essential to Robertson's purpose. In his division of Scottish history into four eras, Robertson's decision to focus on the last two was, in part, the result of the clarity with which events and characters could be viewed clearly: not simply due to the provision of adequate documentation, but also because of the way in which the events themselves were capable of illuminating the characters. As David Womersley has shown, Robertson does not adopt a judicial approach in his evaluation of character in the *History of Scotland*, and this is one reason why his characterisations seem to lack conclusiveness, to be

[383] HS, II, p. 302.
[384] HS, II, p. 300.

contradictory. They are narratively embedded, and their twists and turns reflect the nature of their response to events of bewildering rapidity and complexity. As Womersley also argues, the *History of Scotland* is dominated by themes of secrecy and mystery, yet is rescued by Robertson's confidence in his ability to illuminate their hidden causes.[385] The difficulty of penetrating these motives is due often to their lack of rationality, their capricious and bizarre nature, the difficulty of understanding actions so manifestly imprudent, impolitic and inappropriate: as Robertson says, in the case of Darnley, "it is almost impossible to form any satisfactory conjecture about the motives which influence a capricious mind".[386] Robertson's stance of uncomprehending horror also appears to represent a retreat into scepticism:

> History relates these extravagances of the human mind, without pretending to justify, or even to account for them.[387]

Despite, however, his tendency to cloud all in mystery, it is clear from many of his judgements that this pose of scepticism does not fully represent Robertson's position. Actually, in the course of the narrative, we see a process of movement from mystery to visibility. Once Mary, or her mother, or Bothwell or Morton, lose control of prudence, their use of dissimulation becomes futile: once characters fall under the dominion of resentment or untutored ambition, they are incapable of masking their aims, and therefore of achieving them. The pattern of each individual narrative is towards the exposure that comes with loss of control. Thus, the historian is able to detect from the effects the recurrence of the same old patterns. In fact, Robertson is rather sanguine concerning the ability of the historian to

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[385] Womersley, 'Robertson', Ibid.
[386] HS, I, p. 386.
[387] HS, I, p. 373.

penetrate these mazes, since they lack both intricacy and complexity. Robertson is not shy of confronting, in all their perplexity, the puzzles of the Huntly, Murray or Gowrie conspiracies, and indeed employs copious footnotes in order to explicate them.[388] Indeed, the *Gentleman's Magazine* complained of Robertson's tendency to resort to the conjectures of internal evidence to establish his claims.[389] In the face of the distortions of the historiography, this was often the best form of evidence available. However, Robertson does not use the narrative to describe a fundamental shift in the nature of Scottish history: it is about the recurrence of destructive forms of behaviour, and familiar patterns of action. Character succumbs time and again to imprudence and ultimate failure, and resentment covers all in a blizzard of violent passions. Robertson uses narrative in order to underline the fact that the explanations for historical change lie outside the narrative of events, and outside the control of individual characters. Yet continuously in *The History of Scotland* we have the sense of larger movements happening beyond Scotland's borders, in which Scotland does not participate, and which the confines of national history prevent Robertson from exploring. However, he did provide, in the relentless way in which he traced the actions of the age to the twin sources of resentment and ambition, the beginnings of a natural history of the nature of political events and motivations in the pre-modern world. With the *History of the Reign of Charles V*, he sought to move into that modern world, and on to the stage of Europe, and to depict fully the changes which had been wrought there upon the nature of human motives and actions.

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[388] On Robertson's discussion of the evidence concerning the "opposite conspiracies" against Murray and Darnley, see the footnotes in HS, I, pp. 342-345, which constitute a classic exercise in the probabilistic examination of motives.

[389] Reprinted in *Scots Magazine* 22 (1760), pp. 557-560.

Chapter Five

The Progress of Ambition in *The History of Charles V*

Introduction

In the *History of the Reign of Charles V* , Robertson chose as his subject the history of Europe in the early sixteenth century, one of the most illustrious periods in European history. In the eyes of Robertson's contemporaries, it was an age of extraordinary grandeur, epic in the scale of its events and the variety and glory of its principal characters. Voltaire, true to his vocation as a dramatic poet, saw it as exhibiting "the noblest objects to our view that the theatre of the world ever afforded". It encompassed the birth of the modern world in religion, learning and 'taste'; the vast struggle for glory between Charles V and Francis I; the opulence and magnificence of the courts of monarchs beginning to understand that power and art could be combined; and, perhaps most strikingly, the fascinating admixture of chivalric manners with modern *realpolitik*, which while it provided the age with an echo of 'heroic and fabulous times', also connected it to the modern era through the "refined policy" of Charles V.[390] Robertson, more restrained than Voltaire, was equally alive to the potential that the age of Charles V offered both historian and reader for the presentation of history as a magnificent and dramatic spectacle. He invoked the variety of its great and interesting events, the power of the opposing forces, and the grand ambitions of the "the most illustrious monarchs who have at any one time appeared in Europe" as justifications for his decision, against the advice of David Hume, to write the history of Charles' reign.[391] Above all, for Robertson, it was an 'active age', a time in which all of Europe was set in motion, and became the arena for splendid actions and grandiloquent gestures. The *History of the Reign*

[390] Voltaire, General History, II, pp. 139-143.

of Charles V was therefore a narrative focused upon action, and the purposive exercise of power and authority.

Nonetheless, this action took a very different form from that of previous and more primitive ages, and differed markedly from the narrative that Robertson had given in the *History of Scotland.*

Montesquieu, in his *Réflexions sur la Monarchie Universelle en Europe*, had shown how the developing equality of states, and advances in the art of war, had produced in Europe a sort of military stasis, which frustrated the efforts of any power to subdue the others by force. War was no longer the motor of historical change:

> Si l'on se rappelle les Histoires, on verra que ce ne sont point les guerres qui, depuis quatre-cens ans, ont fait en Europe les grands changemens; mais les mariages, les successions, les traités, les édits; enfin, c'est par les dispositions civiles que l'Europe change et a changé.[392]

The operations of war in the modern era were encumbered by cost, time, the multiplicity of obstacles, and perhaps most importantly by the "mobilité des esprits" and the "variété des passions".[393] The efforts of Charles V to establish a supreme authority throughout Europe had been negated by his rivalship with Francis I, but the subsequent attempts of his successors to emulate his ambition had been counteracted by the merging of all of Europe

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[391] HCV, II, p. 103: "such a constellation of great princes shed uncommon lustre on the sixteenth century".
[392] Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, 'Réflexions sur la Monarchie Universelle en Europe', Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. III (ed. André Masson, Paris, 1955), pp. 361-382; p. 365.
[393] Ibid., p. 366.

into a single political entity: "L'Europe n'est plus qu'une nation composée de plusieurs". To attack one province hurt all, and so all were attentive to the interests of each other.[394] This change in the underlying structure of forces altered the nature of events, and therefore, as Montesquieu implied, the nature of history itself.

Montesquieu's insight that, despite the grandeur of the new type of events that the modern world afforded, these events would be compromised by the variety and complexity of the factors within which they were enmeshed, is precisely the point that Robertson illustrates throughout the course of his narrative. This is the modern pattern of narrative, instead of the simplistic and limited series of events that Robertson depicted in the *History of Scotland.* It is not simply the acquisition of mutual force that distinguishes modern Europe from its medieval counterpart: it is the sheer multiplicity of characters, nations, interests, passions and ambitions that need to be perceived, encompassed, adjusted and appeased by a modern statesman that characterises modern Europe. It was Robertson's aim to trace the evolution of this new disposition of forces, unique to modern Europe, both in the *longue durée*, and in the crucial period of transition that Robertson identified in the reign of Charles V. Thus Robertson adopted a dual approach: the *View of the Progress of Society in Europe* was designed to trace the prehistory of modern political action, in which the nations of Europe are represented as lacking external force because of their internal convulsions. In the *View*, Europe is characterised as an empty space, lacking meaningful and sustained interaction. In the narrative of *Charles V*, by contrast, Europe is transformed into a site of action, a 'Theatre' of splendid and vividly described events, and the arena in which all the princes of Europe strenuously interact with each other. Thus the transition from the *View* to the

[394] Ibid., p. 378.

narrative of *Charles V* traces the emergence of Europe as a common space of interaction between nations. The disjunction between the middle ages and the modern world therefore concerns the *stage* upon which historical actions occur. With princes freed from the straitjacket of national history, and its interminable narratives of the struggles between kings, lords and commons, their ambitions, interests and passions are given a new scope, new objects on which to focus, and a new set of interrelationships in which to intervene. Thus, the nature of historical action itself is altered, with the alteration of the context of historical action, and with it the nature of narrative.

Charles V is the exemplification of this new freedom of action and, crucially, of perception and motivation. He acts as the conduit through which this sense of the interconnectedness of the interests of all the states of Europe is conveyed, and so acts as a bridge between the Europe of the *View*, and that of the narrative. He represents fully the new demands placed upon the statesman by the development of the new resources of the state, and the consequent emergence of inescapably interconnected interests throughout Europe. Through his penetrating gaze and the engine of his ambition he accelerates the process by uniting all of Europe into one sphere of action, in attempting to co-ordinate every part into the structure of his interests. The final outcome of Charles' unifying gaze, however, is deeply ironic: he merely schools the statesmen of Europe to comprehend the relationship of their own interests to his own all-consuming ambition, and activates them to counteract it. The result is an entirely new Europe, characterised by the interplay of character, and the mutual study and adjustment of conflicting interests. Most of all, this new Europe requires the careful and perceptive scrutiny of character and interests, and a flexible mastery of the intricacies of role-play. In Robertson's scheme, the notion of ambition is absolutely central to the

development of this process. An ahistorical and abstract principle, an indistinct and general "ruling passion", and a potentially dangerous and destructive force, Robertson shows it to be a constantly expanding and shifting motive for action, which draws all of Europe into its powerful orbit, and which is then in turn regulated and controlled by its diversification into competing ambitions. Overall, *Charles V* has built into it a commentary on the nature of historiography, and a history of the "progress of ambition", both of which need to be demonstrated narratively in order to be grasped.

1. Questions of Genre

The *History of the Reign of Charles V* has usually been discussed as two separate and separable works, each representing a distinct genre of historiography. While the narrative of the actions of Charles V and his contemporaries has been seen as a conventional, formulaic and rather dull specimen of military and diplomatic history, the *View* has been praised as a pioneering example of theoretical history, applying the lessons learnt from Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Adam Smith to produce a remarkably coherent study of feudal society. As a consequence, not only has the *View* received more critical attention than the body of the history, it has even been raised to the status of a complete history in itself.[395] The unity of the *View*, its apparently tight and self-contained structure, as well as its distinct subject-matter, has no doubt aided this process of detaching theoretical introduction from narrative. Certainly, by the early nineteenth century, such critics as Garat, the biographer of

[395] William Robertson, The Progress of Society in Europe (ed. Felix Gilbert; University of Chicago Press, 1972).

Robertson's French translator Suard, considered it to be "moins une introduction, qu'une histoire universelle de l'Europe modern".[396] Lord Brougham declared it to be the "most perfect example of general or philosophical history anywhere to be seen", and for Sir Archibald Alison it represented "the greatest step which the human mind had yet made in the philosophy of history".[397] To an extent, this bias was present in the first critical responses to the history. Dr John Blair wrote to Robertson that "the first volume however has the greatest number of admirers" and Dr Douglas confirmed that "Your first Volume is looked upon as a production superior to every thing that hath ever appeared in our Language...The first volume is always what is uppermost when the Conversation turns upon you".[398] In France, Turgot's dissenting voice was silenced by Condorcet, who informed him that "Votre jugement est fort opposé à celui du moment, tout le monde admire l'introduction".[399] The critical response to the *View of the Progress of Society* was certainly overwhelming, and after the neo-classical strains of the *History of Scotland*, it positioned Robertson in a new, more recognisably modern historiographical *milieu*. This was particularly the case in Europe, where critics such as Friedrich-Melchior Grimm were eager to classify Robertson with the historical revolution of Montesquieu and Voltaire, rather than with the more conventional narrative history of Hume. In particular what was praised was the historian's command of vast materials, the scope of his historical vision. Grimm especially singled out Robertson's "profondeur du coup

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[396] Dominique Joseph Garat, Mémoires sur la vie de M. Suard, sur ses écrits, et sur le XVIIIe Siècle (Paris, 1820), I, p. 320.
[397] Brougham, Lives of Men of Letters and Science who flourished in the Time of George III (London, 1845), I, pp. 288-289 (MWC, p. 289), although as a whole Brougham preferred *Scotland* and *America* for their "more remarkable beauties of a *historical* kind": Ibid. (my italics). Archibald Alison, 'Guizot', Blackwood's Magazine 56 (1844), pp. 786-804.
[398] John Blair to Robertson, 13 April 1769, NLS MS 3942, f. 89; Dr Douglas to Robertson, 21st April 1769, NLS MS 3942, f. 91.
[399] Turgot to Condorcet, Letter XXXIII, Correspondence inedite de Condorcet et de Turgot 1770-1779 (Paris, 1882), p.46.

d'oeil".[400] Gudin rather portentously declared that Robertson was the Virgil to Voltaire's Homer, and that in the *View*, drawing on Voltaire's example, he had produced a "grand tableau...clair, précis, exact, si bien ordonné que l'oeil du spectateur discerne tous les objets sans peine". The pictorial figure of *tableau* highlighted the lofty perspective of the historian, and the privileged oversight of the historical process that the historian was able to give to the reader. Such *tableaux* as those produced by Robertson and Voltaire, in scope and in their synthesis of diverse materials, were uniquely modern in both form and subject-matter: "tableaux dont les anciens, borne à peindre la Grece ou l'empire de Rome, ne nous ont point laissé de modeles".[401] Garat compared the View to Montesquieu's *Considerations* in that both possessed "une certaine manière de voir les événemens dans leurs causes, pour en former des chaines, ou tout soit principe et resultat". Thus, of historians, only Robertson and Montesquieu "ont tracé le tableau de la feodalitie de l'Europe, et peut-être du Monde".[402] By its presentation of a vast historical perspective within a unified streamline form, it illustrates the Enlightenment's vision of history as a synthesis of indigestible multiplicity into lucid simplicity. The impact of the *View* upon readers seemed to eclipse critical discussion of the narrative, which in its very conventionality offered little room for criticism, and in return provoked only conventionalised praise. In contrast with the *View*, the narrative portion of history was apparently remote from such 'philosophical' projects and concerns.[403]

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[400] Friedrich Melchior Grimm, Correspondance Litteraire, Philosophique et Critique (vol. 9; ed. Maurice Tourneaux, Paris, 1879), pp. 291-292 (April 1771): "Ses développements sont le fruit d'une extrême sagacité, dirigée par un ésprit plein de sagesse et de lumière, et par un bon sens exquis".
[401] Gudin de la Brenellerie, Supplement à la manière d'écrire l'histoire (Paris, 1784), pp. 115-119.
[402] Garat, Ibid. Garat also compared it to Montesquieu's Considerations: "qui, comme les Considerations sur les Romains, ne réduit les faits que parce qu'elle les choisit et les lie de manière à tout éclairer par leur liaison et par leur choix".

Nonetheless, *Charles V* does not consist of two discrete and unrelated projects. Robertson, more than most eighteenth-century historians, was aware of the importance of arrangement as the central task of the historian, and was concerned to maintain the structural unity of his work.[404] This does not mean that Robertson was always successful in his attempts to hold all the elements of his work together. As a recent Robertson scholar has noted, the *History of Charles V* "straddles two historiographies", and therefore a tension exists between his "narrative and descriptive imperatives". [405] In order to understand how Robertson sought to deal with, or minimise those tensions, it is necessary to pay attention once again to the narrative, to place the *View* in its precise textual relationship to the narrative, and to reassert Robertson's identity as a predominantly narrative historian, and moreover a writer of narrative of a very particular kind. From this perspective, whatever the great merits of the *View* as an autonomous work, its primary purpose was to serve the narrative. As the *Annual Register* pointed out, echoing Robertson himself, the *View* functioned as a preliminary to the 'great events' of the age of Charles V.[406] Horace Walpole, while appreciating the value of the *View*, in a striking if rather glib theatrical metaphor emphasised the degree to which he regarded it as merely preparatory to the main performance: "I shall not be more pleased with the Dress into which you have put Charles the fifth, than I am with your manner of preparing

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[403] It is significant that Mably offers no criticism of the narrative portions of either the History of Scotland or Charles V; and that overall, as Gudin noted, he treats Robertson "moins mal" than either Voltaire or Hume. Gudin, Ibid.

[404] Thomas Somerville testified to this commitment on Robertson's part. As Robertson had said to him, "Every man who has written history knows that the most difficult part of his work has been the arrangement": Somerville, My Own Life and Times 1741-1814 (Edinburgh, 1861), p. 275.

[405] Karen O'Brien, Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan history from Voltaire to Gibbon (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 134.

[406] Annual Register (1769), pp. 254-256. The reviewer added however that it is the View "which many of his readers will consider as the most valuable part of the work".

and arranging his dressing-room".[407] As Dr Douglas explained, that the *View* was accorded apparently excessive attention was "natural in men of letters: "you amuse and entertain every reader, in the History of your Heroe's Life; but you instruct & you inform even the learned Reader in the preparatory Volume".[408] The implication here is that for the learned the history divides into two components: the entertainment of the narrative, and the instruction provided by the *View*. For the lay reader, however, the *View* and the narrative offer alike instruction and entertainment, and the primary purpose of the *View* must be to offer a guide to the ensuing narrative. Despite this specialisation in the readership, it was still the narrative that brought together readers of all descriptions into a single unifying experience of pleasure, and that captivated the interest of the general public.

The nature of the pleasure, and the parts of the narrative that most effectively aroused it, can be glimpsed in the 'Characters' section of the *Annual Register,* which reprinted extracts from Robertson's narrative that conveyed the tendencies and strengths of his history. The focus of reviewers and readers therefore was not exclusively on the macrocosmic *tableau* of the history of the middle ages, but was also concerned with the more intimate and delicate portraiture of particular events and characters. As we have seen, the process of characterisation gave reviewers and periodicals a means of presenting the narrative in shorthand to readers, and of arousing their interest. This was the case also with *Charles V*:

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[407] Walpole to Robertson, 7th March 1769, NLS MS 3942, f. 87. In actual fact, the narrative of *Charles V* was to be the turning point in Walpole's increasingly negative assessment of Robertson as a historian: see Walpole to William Mason, 10th June 1777, Letters of Horace Walpole (ed. Paget Toynbee; Oxford University Press, 1950), X, p. 60; and to the Countess of Upper Ossory, 23rd November 1791, XV, p. 90. On Walpole's conception of history, see Peter Sabor, 'Horace Walpole as a Historian', Duckworth, Colin, and Le Grand, Homer, Studies in the Eighteenth-Century (6): Papers Presented at the Sixth David Nichol Smith Memorial Seminar Eighteenth Century Life 10-11 (1987), pp. 5-17.

[408] Douglas to Robertson, 21st April 1769, NLS MS 3942, f. 91.

the *Annual Register* focused upon either the characters or the self-contained mini-narratives, designed to reveal character, concerning Ximines, Barbarossa, John Bocold and the Anabaptists of Munster, Luther, and Andrew Doria, culminating of course with the virtuoso comparison of the characters of Charles V and Francis I which lay at the heart of the narrative.[409] This interest in character was not restricted to the readers of reviews, but to attentive readers of the narratives themselves. As John Blair told Robertson, "The Ministry of *Cardinal Ximines* & the *Conduct of Luther* are favorite passages".[410] The common thread linking each of these selections was the interest in the dynamics of character: Barbarossa, Ximines and Luther are all depicted as masters of character projection, and their ability to combine a variety of identities and persona in a harmonious relationship lends a great complexity and richness to their description.[411] The character of Doria displayed, conversely, the ahistorical language of republican and military virtue, and its appeal to the audience may have lain in a self-conscious comparison of the virtues of this minor character both with the world of *realpolitik* which Robertson paints in the sixteenth century, and with the less amiable and virtuous qualities of their representative, Charles V. The ability of reviewers and readers to extract these episodes of character from the narrative no doubt aided Robertson's success, as well as his reputation as a master of the form. However, there is an extent to which the presentation of this gallery of characters necessarily misrepresented the larger pattern of characterisation manifested in the narrative. In each case, with the possible exceptions of Doria and Barbarossa, the mechanics of character which they illustrated were

[409] Annual Register (1769), pp. 8-29.
[410] John Blair to Robertson, 13th April 1769, NLS MS 3942, f. 89
[411] Robertson was clearly fascinated by the character of Ximines. Indeed, Robertson felt the need to justify creating a space within the narrative to allow for a "particular description" of Ximines' character, by invoking its "singularity". Especially, Ximines is at the same time a religious and a politician, and he maintains and assumes both roles without harming either. He straddles the worlds of

understandable only in terms of the age of transition of which they were a part. Robertson's interest in character was not simply in the conventional display of virtues and vices. Rather, the language of character that he employed in the narrative was intended to link up on the one hand with a theoretical framework which explored and exposed the nature of political character, and on the other placed into a pattern of narrative dictated by the dominant character of Charles V. Nonetheless, Robertson's continued ability to master the 'character' form was a means of importing his concern with the mechanics of character into the narrative as a by-product of the notion of history as the exhibitor of the spectacle of character.

Hume from the beginning had disagreed with Robertson's insistence on writing a history of Charles V, protesting that Charles was not a sufficiently *interesting* character to sustain a history of which he was to be the principal focus and the sole connecting principle. Robertson conceded the point in the case of Charles' private life, but adhered to the principle that what was necessary in a history was the revelation of *political* rather than private character:

> The circumstances transmitted to us, with respect to Charles' private deportment and character, are fewer and less interesting, than might have been expected from the great number of authors who have undertaken to write an account of his life. These are not the object of this history, which aims at representing the great transactions of

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political interest and manipulation, and the lofty disinterestedness and austerity of his monastic character. HCV, II, pp. 31-34, pp. 54-55.

> the reign of Charles V. and pointing out the manner in which they affected the political state of Europe, than at delineating his private virtues or defects.[412]

This is a point that Dugald Stewart grasped:

> His character...was singularly adapted to Dr Robertson's purpose; not only as the ascendant it secured to him in the political world marks him out indisputably as the principal figure in that illustrious group which then appeared on the Theatre of Europe, but as it everywhere displays that deep and sagacious policy, which, by systematizing his counsels, and linking together the great events of his reign, inspires a constant interest, if not for the personal fortunes of the man, at least for the magnificent projects of the politician.[413]

Stewart indicated that Charles V's character inspired a different kind of interest and pleasure from that sought by Hume's Plutarchan *vignettes*. It is a pleasure whose source lies in the connection of events, and the contemplation of unified systems of action. Charles' character for Robertson acts as a principle of action, and as the embodiment of the themes of unity, vigour, and 'system' traced in the *View*. In placing the politician above the man, Robertson demonstrates his own interest in character as the balancing and projection of public roles, and at the same time seeks to re-establish the high political narrative as the basis of serious historical writing. In *The History of the Reign of Charles V*, the language of character is enmeshed in and refracted through a history of manners which provides the context for a political narrative that is both conventional and innovatory. The depiction of Charles'

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[412] HCV, IV, p. 290.
[413] Stewart, 'Account', MWC, p. 124.

character in terms of the ruling passion of ambition, while apparently sterile and conventional, displays the internal connection within the work between the *View* and the narrative, since the *View* can be seen in part as a history of the "progress of ambition". [414]

2. The Middle Ages and the History of Events

The *View of the Progress of Society in Europe* was closely tied to Robertson's narrative purpose in the *History of Charles V*. It was intended as neither a full stadial history of Europe, nor as a broadly-conceived history of manners.[415] Robertson conceived it to function on several levels as a "necessary introduction to the following work", and the vastness of its scope was to an extent limited by the overriding need to provide an explanation of the shape of the events recounted in the main body of the narrative. As well as furnishing the information concerning the several states whose actions were to be drawn within the ambit of the narrative, it was also an exploration of the boundary between a history of events and a 'theoretical' history of structures, laws and manners. In marking the transition from one to another, it mirrored in its own form the movement of Europe from a state of non-narrative towards the rehabilitation and widening of a meaningful narrative of events in the modern age. Its tripartite structure reveals the nature of the exercise. While section I provides an account of the evolution and transformation of manners and social structures which appears to answer the description of the *View* as a 'general' or 'theoretical' history, sections II and III

[414] The phrase occurs at HCV, I, p. 139: in describing the wars in Italy, Robertson says that the "progress of ambition was so rapid, and princes extended their operations so fast..."
[415] Smith's criticism that it was an incomplete work, providing only outlines, seems therefore to miss the point, as, unsurprisingly, does that of Gilbert Stuart. See Correspondence of Adam Smith , p. 192: according to the testimony of John Callender, Smith said of Robertson that he was "able to form a good

clearly have a narrower purpose, more closely tied to Robertson's narrative concerns. They depict the growing ability of the individual states of Europe to act purposively upon the European stage. Thus, although the *View* provides only "general principles and events", and is thus far removed from the narrative of events, it was centrally concerned with the re-emergence of a viable history of events, a history of events that would speak to all the readers of Europe, and create the basis for a history of Europe based on actions and events rather than the slow evolution of structures, institutions and manners.

The different stories told in each of the sections is revealing also. Section I describes the evolution of manners consequent upon the expansion of commerce from the early seeds provided by the crusades. It ends with the establishment of a self-regulating system framed by peaceful intercourse, with harmony guaranteed by the recognition of mutual wants and interests. In a sense, as a form of history, it is the furthest removed from the chaotic world of events depicted by particular narratives, except insofar as this stable system of relationships is ultimately rooted in the frantic fanaticism of the crusades. Section II, by contrast, returns the reader to the contemplation of a different system of intercourse, characterised by the operation of mutual suspicion, jealous scrutiny and fear. Although this system is also self-regulating, and tends towards equilibrium in its ultimate outcomes, it clears a space for conflict and violence, which cannot be expelled from the system.[416] In a sense, whatever its comparatively benevolent effects, the European states system does not abolish the themes of

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outline but wanted industry to fill up the plan". For Stuart's criticism of the *View*, see Gilbert Stuart, A View of Society in Europe (Edinburgh, 1778).

conquest and destruction: it can only limit them. In essence, Section II concerns the transformation of the nations of Europe from inert and lifeless bodies sundered from each other by their own internal weaknesses, to a collection of vigorous and unified actors, possessing external force and capable of exerting it: its fulfilment is the great ferment of activity set in motion by Francis I and Charles V. Therefore, Section II registers the shift from one type of history to another: from the internal history of states, which requires as a reference point only the constitution of the individual nation, to the cosmopolitan narrative of the interaction of a number of states, all of which need to be encompassed within the narrative. In Section III Robertson approaches even nearer to the narrative heart of his history, by placing before the reader the 'national characters' of the principal nations of Europe. The *View* thus in its own structure shifts from a theoretical history of manners towards a conventional historiographical introduction, which outlines the chief features of the various constitutions of the major powers of Europe. Instead of referring every nation to a single scheme of development, Robertson moves his discussion into the consideration of diversity, and individuates each nation according to those accidental and contingent factors, such as climate, soil, the 'spirit' of the people, which serve to distinguish it from every other nation. By this means, Robertson introduces his own critique of the scope and inclusiveness of theoretical history: the synthesising perspective of the first section has obscured the very real differences that exist under its homogenous headings. Section III uses the device of national character in order to restore to the *View* that sense of multiplicity which is so lacking from the first section. The *View* in its entirety reveals the need to provide a wide range of

[416] The *Monthly Review* pointed out the apparent contradiction between these two pictures of European development: in fact, commerce excited the nations of Europe to frequent wars that had no other motive. Monthly Review, 40 (1769), p. 333.

contexts for such an ambitious narrative, and a correspondingly wide range of characters with which to compare and by which to judge the actors of the narrative.

On the face of it, the *View* appears to demonstrate a retreat by Robertson from the history of events. Certainly, his lack of interest in the events of the middle ages superficially reflects a typical Enlightenment disdain for this period of ignorance and cruelty.[417] The dominant metaphor that Robertson employed in the *View* was that of 'darkness', expressed in vivid and insistent terms, and contrasted with feeble glimmers of light provided by such exceptional and heroic figures as Charlemagne and Alfred:

> Charlemagne in France, and Alfred the Great in England, endeavoured to dispel this darkness, and gave their subjects a short glimpse of light and knowledge. But the ignorance of the age was too powerful for their efforts and institutions. The darkness returned, and settled more thick and heavy than before.[418]

The darkness does not simply cloud the sight, or the understanding: it is bodied forth, and has a weight, a presence and a suffocating power that mere absence of light would not have. The events of the age were similarly shrouded in darkness. In part this was a problem of sources. As Robertson said, in such an age, the art of history was itself corrupted and debased: "the memory of past transactions was in a great degree lost, or preserved in annals

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[417] For the Scottish Enlightenment on the middle ages, see Herbert Weisinger, 'The Middle Ages and the Late Eighteenth Century Historians', Philological Quarterly 27 (1948); Peter Burke, 'Scottish Historians and the feudal system: the conceptualisation of social change', in Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 191, (1980); Colin Kidd, Subverting Scotland's Past, esp. pp. 109-112.
[418] HCV, I, p. 23.

filled with trifling events or legendary tales".[419] Mackie, Robertson's teacher, had outlined the difficulties facing the historian in attempting to write of this period:

> ...few have the patience to examine it with the attention it deserves, because the Compilers have acted their part so poorly. Not to mention the imperfections of stile address, the gross legends & fables everywhere foisted into these performances, & the dry lifeless & insipid way in which these things are related, most of them seem perfectly indifferent with regard to the truth of events past before their own times, & only copy one another.

For Robertson, the feudal period was an 'unobserving age', characterised by a lack of the faculties of observation and discernment. The 'darkness' of the age had robbed the historians of their ability either to discern the truth or to arrange it harmoniously and persuasively. However, if the events themselves were worthy of relation, this would merely represent to the modern historian a challenge to his own abilities of penetration and reconstruction. This was Mackie's point: "the history of these ages is full of grand revolutions & many memorable events, the knowledge of which are highly usefull, as having often a connection with the times we now live in".[420] He was acutely aware of the importance and utility of medieval history, if the crucial problem of evidence could be overcome. Robertson was less convinced of the virtues of a narrative of the events of the middle ages, although he would have accepted the criterion on which such events were to be selected: the connection that

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[419] HCV, I, p. 22. See also HCV, I, p. 15: "There is no nation in Europe whose records reach back to this remote period; and there is little information to be got from the uninstructive and meagre chronicles, compiled by writers ignorant of the true end, and unacquainted with the proper objects, of history".

[420] Mackie, 'Dissertation', EUL MS La. II. 37, ff. 16-17.

they had with modern events. Of themselves, they were classified as a species of events that did not deserve to be reconstructed, and were unworthy of being related to a modern audience for whom they would be both disgusting and tedious. As Robertson said of the history of Gregory of Tours, "we meet with a series of deeds of cruelty, perfidy, and revenge so wild and enormous as almost to exceed belief".[421] This was not merely a critique of medieval historiography, for Robertson's point is that despite the credulity and absurdity of medieval chroniclers, the general pattern of events is perfectly credible, but nonetheless shocking to modern sensibilities. Therefore, a detail of the actions of the age, however well supported by evidence, would lack taste and be morally objectionable. More than that, Robertson felt that the events of the middle ages lacked both consequence and consequences, and so were ineffectual, and their pattern sporadic and irregular:

> ...a succession of uninteresting events, a series of wars the motives as well as the consequences of which were unimportant, fill and deform the annals of all the nations of Europe.
>
> Almost all the wars of Europe during the ages which I have mentioned were trifling, indecisive, and productive of no considerable event. They resembled the short incursions of pirates or banditti rather than the steady operations of a regular army.[422]

Their inherent lack of interest is due to the absence of purposive, regular and sustained action, that "perseverance of effort" which so impressed Robertson, and which was to be the basis of his admiration for Charles V. The inability of the political structures of the middle

[421] HCV, I, p. 24.

ages to sustain such events is made central to Robertson's story in the *View*, which sees the middle ages as a barren and empty field for historiography.

The deformity of medieval history, its unfitness for particular narrative, was related to the imperfections of feudal government, its lack of unity and, consequently, force. The feudal system is represented by Robertson as an unnatural institution, which frustrates the natural desires and rights of human nature, and buckles under the weight of its own inherent instabilities and absurdities. One of its absurdities was the way in which it crippled the state, prevented it from acting, and squandered its resources in internal divisions and warfare:

> A kingdom dismembered, and torn with dissension, without any common interest to rouse or any common head to conduct its force, was incapable of acting with vigour...The state itself, destitute of union, either remained altogether inactive, or, if it attempted to make any effort, that served to discover its impotence.

Without a principle of unity, feudal states were paralysed by internal conflict, and so were incapable of acting with vigour. Only briefly, under the 'superior genius' of Charlemagne, did an unimproved feudal polity rouse itself to *act*; and it was his intervention that "restored to government that degree of activity which distinguishes his reign and renders the transactions of it objects not only of attention, but of admiration, to more enlightened times". The spirit which Charlemagne infuses into his empire cannot however be sustained under the pressure of the weight of darkness. In the context of the pre-modern period such circumstances were exceptional and transitory, created solely by the qualities of a hero,

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[422] HCV, I, pp. 20-21.

whose isolation in this epoch of darkness is extravagantly dramatised by his inclusion in a narrative of predominantly impersonal forces. Charlemagne is characterised by Robertson as the 'spirit' which animated a vast 'system' of government; but this 'spirit' was not natural to the feudal system, and so swiftly evaporated once Charlemagne was removed:

> The superior genius of Charlemagne, it is true, united all these disjointed and discordant members, and forming them again into one body, restored to the government that degree of activity which distinguishes his reign, and renders the transactions of it, not only objects worthy of attention but of admiration to more enlightened times. But this state of union and vigour, not beng natural to the feudal government, was of short duration. Immediately upon his death, the spirit which animated and sustained the vast system which he had established, being withdrawn, it broke into pieces.[423]

As Robertson tellingly observes, the 'ignorance of the age' was too powerful for the 'efforts and institutions' of men such as Alfred the Great, Charlemagne and St Louis. The lesson that the individual cannot seek to overturn single-handed the manners of a people or the 'spirit' belonging to a form of government was taken to be the central message of the *View* by historians such as Alison.[424] Nonetheless Robertson's use of the language of 'animation' and 'spirit' for Charlemagne seems to suggest that Robertson believed that individuals were capable, for a time, of compensating for the absence of forceful unity dictated by the structure of laws and manners. Apart from such fleeting and elusive heroic figures, the first section of the *View* is unpeopled by particular actors, and populated solely by those "general

[423] HCV, I, p. 20.

principles and events" that can only be glimpsed in the light of a later, more improved age. If the medieval period was the "unobserving age", its lack of observation was related to the fact that its visible events were lacking in objective meaning. All that was worthy of notice in medieval history took place beneath the surface of events, and was incapable of being revealed by them.

Robertson's reduction of medieval history to a dissertation upon the weaknesses of the feudal system therefore reflected not only the nature of the *View* as a preparatory volume for the main narrative, but also Robertson's overwhelming sense of the meaninglessness of medieval action. This is emphasised starkly by Robertson's concentration upon the concept of Europe. For Robertson, 'Europe' in the middle ages does not exist as a site of action. As Robertson shows in the *View*, feudal Europe consists of a series of separate but categorically similar nations that lack communication with each other, fragmented and turned inward by the centripetal force of the feudal system as it operates in each nation. While imposing upon them an "amazing uniformity", the feudal policy sunders nations from each other, and prevents them from experiencing any serious or sustained interaction. In order to write the history of Europe in the pre-modern period, therefore, it would be necessary to consider each nation in isolation. Robertson's experience in writing the *History of Scotland* probably formed the basis of the manifesto that he laid out in the preface to the *History of Charles V*:

> No period in the history of one's own country can be considered as altogether uninteresting...But with respect to the history of foreign nations, we must set other

[424] See above. See also Karen O'Brien, Narratives of Enlightenment, p. 140: in the View, Robertson shows himslef to be a "methodological collectivist".

> bounds to our desire of information. The universal progress of science, during the last two centuries, the art of printing, and other obvious causes, have filled Europe with such a multiplicity of histories, and with such vast collections of historical materials, that the term of human life is too short for the study or even perusal of them. It is necessary, then, not only for those who are called to conduct the affairs of nations, but for such as inquire and reason concerning them, to remain satisfied with a general knowledge of distant events, and to confine their study of history in detail to that period, in which the States of Europe having become intimately connected, the operations of one power are so felt by all, as to influence their counsels, and to regulate their measures.
>
> Some boundary, then, ought to be fixed in order to separate these periods. An aera should be pointed out, prior to which, each country, little connected with those around it, may trace its own history apart; after which, the transactions of Europe become instructive and interesting to all.[425]

That boundary was placed by Robertson on the cusp of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and had its first demonstration in the reign of Charles V. Robertson's lesson that there is a shift in the nature of Europe, in the conditions of political action and in historical writing in the late fifteenth century that causes a radical disjunction between the middle ages and the modern age, is dramatically illustrated in the difference of form taken by the *View of the Progress of Society* and the narrative of *Charles V*. The sort of narrative, connecting all of Europe into a unified sphere of action, that *Charles V* unfolds would not be possible in the prevailing conditions of the middle ages. Conversely, the type of theoretical history that

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[425] HCV, I, pp. ix-x.

Section I represents would be inappropriate if applied to the modern Europe, since Europe can no longer be reduced to a single legal-constitutional category, the feudal system. As Section III demonstrates, the emphasis of modern Europe on the states as actors entailed an appreciation of their diversity. In section I, there is no room for any real diversity beneath the deadening unity of the feudal superstructure.[426]

3. Manners and Maxims: The Progress of Ambition

The *View* is a moving tableau, rather than a static portrait of a particular society or set of manners. Built into Robertson's very conception of the feudal system is the idea of change, decay and corruption:

> The principles of disorder and corruption are discernible in that constitution under its best and most perfect form. They soon unfolded themselves, and, spreading with rapidity through every part of the system, produced the most fatal effects.[427]

If the *View* is a history of progress, it is also one of progressive instability and collapse. As a 'system', the feudal government lacks any kind of stasis or equilibrium. Under the feudal system, manners and characters, however rational and explicable in the specific situations

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[426] The *View* is therefore distinct from those forms of 'universal' history that merely provided a series of imperfectly connected summary narratives of each nation, either placing them in juxtaposition to each other, or as with Mackie's *Lectures on Universal History* interweaving them into each other's narratives. This was the form taken by *Bossuet's Histoire Universelle*, and also by Voltaire's *Essai sur les Moeurs*. See Orest P. Ranum, 'Introduction' to Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, Discourse on Universal History (trans. Elborg Forsted; University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. xiii-xlii.

[427] HCV, I, p. 17. Robertson's depiction of the feudal system is entirely conventional, and largely drawn from the studies of French feudalism by Montesquieu, Mably and Du Cange. In purely structural terms, Robertson is less concerned to display feudalism as a self-contained system, but as a phase

from which they spring, are undergoing a constant process of erosion, and cannot therefore be represented as fixed and stable. The effect of the *View*, despite the hiatus that the middle ages represents in terms of a history of events, is of a bewildering rapidity of change, compressed into a narrow compass. Thus, Robertson at the beginning of Section II dramatises the shift in human character, from the barbarism and primitive warrior ethic of the German tribes, to the combination of refinement and force of modern manners:

> When we survey the state of society, or the character of individuals, at the opening of the fifteenth century, and then turn back to view the condition of both at the time when the barbarous tribes which overturned the Roman power completed their settlement in their new conquests, the progress which mankind had made towards order and refinement will appear immense.[428]

Order and refinement by the fifteenth century are visible not simply at the level of society as a whole, but within the internal makeup of each individual, and the progress of the sentiments and behaviour of the individual are also capable of being perceived and measured. The *View* is in part the story of the transformation of European from the unindividuated unity and simplicity of the barbarian, under the dominion of the ruling passions of vengeance and resentment, to the complexity and multi-dimensionality of modern, commercial man:

> It is necessary to mark the great steps by which they [the Germanic nations] advanced from barbarism to refinement, and to point out those general principles which, by

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which from its inception begins to undergo fragmentation, than the 'snapshot' dissertations of David Hume and Robert Henry.

[428] HCV, I, pp. 98-99.

> their uniform as well as extensive operation, conducted all of them to that degree of improvement in policy and in manners which they had attained at the period when Charles V began his reign.[429]

The 'German' could be used as a template enabling the scale of the shift in character in the millennium after the fall of Rome to be measured and assessed correctly. By associating it with the character of the American savage, Robertson emphasises and even exaggerates the scale of the disjunction between the barbarous and modern peoples of Europe.[430] What gives the *View* its complexity, however, is the fact that the feudal system intervenes into this pattern of undifferentiated progress. Feudalism lies outside the terms of 4-stage typology, and so far from participating in the progress and evolution of human character, serves to depress and smother it. Feudalism operates upon the human mind to efface all that is natural and healthy in the original German character, at the same time as it renders mankind ignorant and impolite:

> As the inhabitants of Europe, during these centuries, were strangers to the arts which embellish a polished age, they were destitute of the virtues which abound among people who continue in a simple state...Human society is in its most corrupted state, at that period when men have lost their original independence and simplicity of manners, but have not attained that degree of refinement which introduces a sense of decorum and of propriety in conduct, as a restraint on those passions which lead to heinous crimes.[431]

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[429] HCV, I, pp. 13-14.
[430] HCV, I, p. 10. For Robertson's early characterisation of the Americans as a form of 'barbarian', see HCV, I, pp. 246-254.
[431] HCV, I, pp. 23-24.

The feudal system warps all the relations of human life, and indeed reduces all to the level of lord and slave. Europe's emergence from the shadow of feudalism is therefore that of the emancipation of human character from the confines of the feudal straitjacket imposed by the legal categories of lord, freeman, villein, and slave.[432] Robertson depicts the progress of the human mind, its discovery of new qualities and powers: "the human mind became conscious of powers which it did not formerly perceive, and fond of occupations of which it was formerly incapable". In particular, the spirit of commerce altered the nature of transformed the basis of judgements of character, and formed new standards of propriety for behaviour.

Robertson connects together this progress of manners with that of maxims. Indeed, if section I was primarily concerned with the awakening of manners, and the evolution of human character and the human mind, section II sought to trace the tardy effect which this progress had upon the ability of government to "act with the united vigour of the whole community, or carry on great undertakings with perseverance and success".[433] Although section II is entitled 'View of the Progress of Society in Europe with respect to the command of the national force requisite in foreign operations', it also concerns the motivations by which a state can be roused to act, and the objects upon which ambition is fixed. Robertson places it in a

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[432] Robertson shows in Note IX, HCV, I, pp. 272-278, the degree to which 'character' in the feudal system was determined by mere legal status. Nonetheless, feudalism was a condition in which the legal establishment of three distinct classes of people beneath the level of noble and knight failed however to ensure a separation in either function or condition. Instead of a regular order of ranks, there were in fact only two real distinctions under the feudal system: master and servant. The identity of freemen slipped into that of villein, and accorded no status, and so led to the situation in which there was no intermediate body of people: "the condition of those dignified with the name of freemen was often little preferable to that of the other". It had become a mere name.

[433] HCV, I, p. 100. David Wootton has applied Robertson's term "maxims and manners" to the investigation of the nature of interest in Sarpi's histories: Wootton, Ibid.,

comparative perspective by referring back to the primitive yet communal passions by which a savage tribe can be moved to act in concert:

> They are excited to act, not by the distant objects or the refined speculation which interest or affect men in polished societies, but by their present feelings. The insults of an enemy kindle resentment; the success of a rival tribe awakens emulation: these passions communicate from breast to breast, and all the members of the community, with united ardour, rush into the field in order to gratify their revenge or to acquire distinction.[434]

In larger states, the force of these passions is limited, and only in despotic or polished states can force be wielded with that measure of unity that is necessary. The feudal polities are, as is to be expected, in both an intermediate and artificial situation, in which the king, technically supreme, is in fact fettered by the feudal aristocracy, who "watched all the motions of the sovereign with a jealous attention which set bounds to his ambition and either prevented his forming schemes of extensive conquest, or obstructed the execution of them".[435] This is important: the ambitions of the monarch are unnaturally circumscribed. Robertson stated near the beginning of section II that the "amazing inactivity" of monarchs during the late middle ages, and especially with regard to the wars between France and England, could not be imputed to "any incapacity of discerning their political consequences":

> The power of judging with sagacity, and of acting with vigour, is the portion of men in every age. The monarchs who reigned in the different kingdoms of Europe, during

[434] HCV, I, p. 100.
[435] HCV, I, pp. 101-102.

> several centuries, were not blind to their particular interest, negligent of the public safety, or strangers to the method of securing both.[436]

The failure of monarchs to respond to the natural and obvious dictates of interest was, rather, to be ascribed to the weakness of their situation. Sagacity is an extra-historical phenomenon, not subject to historical evolution, but the conditions under which sagacity and discernment are to be exercised do vary. The question is not so much about the ability to discern, but the actual opportunities for discernment, just as the progress of knowledge was not about the acquisition of mental powers, but their progressive unfolding. As we have noted, the middle ages for Robertson was characterised by its inability to observe.

> During several centuries, the nations of Europe appear to have considered themselves as separate societies, scarcely connected together by any common interest, and little concerned in each other's affairs or operations. An extensive commerce did not afford them an opportunity of observing and penetrating into the schemes of every different state. They had not ambassadors residing constantly in every court, to watch and give early intelligence of all its motions.[437]

The princes of Europe, distracted and turned inward by their interminable constitutional struggles with the barons, were prevented from "giving such attention to the schemes and transactions of their neighbours as might lead them to form any regular system of public security". Such failures of attention led princes to miscalculate and misjudge even the events of which they were, dimly, aware:

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[436] HCV, I, p. 107.

> In each kingdom of Europe great events and revolutions happened, which the other powers beheld with the same indifference as if they had been uninterested spectators, to whom the effect of these transactions could never extend.[438]

The absence of any notion of Europe as an effective community of action, and the lack of visible links between nations, ensured that only when the distant effects of actions were perceived and felt would there be a response to any of the internal transactions of other nations. Robertson's vision of the nations of Europe as silent and passive spectators of each other involves, apparently, a curious paradox: since the 'spectatorial' image implies the kind of discernment and judgement that the men of the middle ages perforce lacked.[439]

The acquisition of united force by feudal states depended upon the monarch's ability to break himself out of the deadlock held by the nobility. Robertson's obvious regret at the failure of Scotland to develop a strong and cohesive state structure in the sixteenth century informed his rather authoritarian view of the emergence of the new monarchy in the fifteenth century.[440] The 'progress of ambition' refers to the enlargement of the possibility of the monarch's views, interests and capability of action as a result. This process was presented by

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[437] HCV, I, p. 104.
[438] HCV, I, p. 105.
[439] Although compare with the image that Robertson uses for the Peruvians in the History of America, which describes the transition of the Peruvians from actors to passive spectators. See below, p.
[440] This theme was at the centre of modern European historiography from Machiavelli onwards. See J.G.A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment (Princeton University Press, 1975). In Scotland, the civic republican Andrew Fletcher had provided a fascinating account of this process, which influenced many thinkers of the Scottish literati: see 'A Discourse of Government with relation to Militias', in Selected Political Writings and Speeches (ed. David Daiches; Edinburgh, 1979), esp. pp. 4-11. For the implications that this held for the political thinking of the Scottish Enlightenment, see John Robertson, The Scottish Enlightenment and the Militia Issue (Edinburgh, 1985).

Robertson as a series of unpredictable and contingent events which were nonetheless governed by natural and immutable laws. At the heart of Robertson's analysis was his sense that the feudal anarchy was unsustainable, vulnerable to any changes or instabilities occurring within its system. The ambition, sagacity and ability of monarchs remained constant, did not decline: sooner or later, Robertson intimates, the monarchy would find a way of asserting its fictional powers for real. The French wars with England were the occasion for this revolution of maxims, views, interests and ambitions, a product of the wayward laws of inheritance placing two monarchies in direct competition with each other. The way in which the French monarchy responded was, however, both natural and inevitable, the predictable effects of warfare and national emulation. The less predictable element of French enthusiasm for war, which undermined the power of the nobles, connected with Robertson's analysis of chivalry, and with Smith's picture of the late medieval nobility as a caste embarking upon a collective abdication of power and influence through a failure to detect or adhere to its essential interests.[441] In a sense, the entire shift in manners depicted in the first section serves to undermine the position of the nobility, and to render their qualities obsolete. This occurs partly through the influence of outside pressures: the creation of an entirely new order of humanity, through the operation of commerce, not only creates new standards of behaviour, but frees the human mind from the bondage of slavery, and opens it up to new views, the development of new talents and the reconfiguration of the passions and animating factors of mankind. This can be seen in Robertson's treatment of justice, in which the usurpation of the functions of the judge that the nobility had carried out, turning a judge

[441] Adam Smith, LJ, p. 227 (Report of 1762-3): "But the power of the nobles and their influence over the people soon decreased on the introduction of wealth and luxury...One who spends 10000 pounds on himself and domestick luxury does not indeed form any dependants, nor would he have 3 men that would follow him in case he should rebell..."

into a soldier, is reversed. This is represented by Robertson not only as both the outcome and cause of a profound shift in manners, but as a revolution in human character, the "distinction of professions", which "obliged men to cultivate different talents, and to aim at different accomplishments, in order to qualify themselves for the various departments and functions which became necessary in society". From this point, the character of the nobility will fall into desuetude, with the progressive loss of their judicial functions. In addition, the diversification of society into different orders of men with different interests and views allows the monarch to position himself at the centre of social relations, as a mediator to whom either side can appeal. Once indeed the conditions for balance are met, the monarch is able, if possessed of sufficient skill, to use each order of men as an instrument in his designs.

The advantage of the monarchy lay in its ability to concentrate its efforts in a single person: this was also a weakness, of course. Nonetheless, it was the good fortune of the French to have such powerful and able monarchs as Charles VII and Louis XI in quick succession, who achieved what the succession of Scottish monarchs outlined in Book I of the *History of Scotland* could not. Robertson places at the centre of section II, and indeed at the epicentre of the *View*, a brief but masterly characterisation of Louis XI. The eruption of Louis into a work that thus far had been populated almost solely by shadowy abstractions and generalities, the 'monarch', the 'nobility', the 'people', the 'feudal system' creates an impressive and powerful rhetorical effect. It signifies in Robertson's schema the re-emergence of a history of events focusing on the interplay of individual character with particular events: the remainder of section II is a truncated narrative of the development of events upon the "theatre" of Italy. The focus on Louis is a dramatic shift in tone and emphasis, and also reintroduces the possibility of individual human agency so cruelly denied the successors of Charlemagne or

Alfred. It is also, in Sallustian fashion, the explanation of the events that follow: although Louis is not figured as the lone architect of the new system of policy, his exertions are the principal occasion of its existence, and Louis emerges from the *View* as the pattern of the new historiography, and the first subject of the new historiography that Robertson centres on the figure of Charles V. Robertson begins however by placing Louis outside the progressive pattern of the *View*, and locating him in an extra-historical world of universal human types, drawing upon historiographical tradition to portray him as a tyrant:

> Louis was formed by nature to be a tyrant; and at whatever period he had been called to ascend the throne, his reign must have abounded with schemes to oppress his people and to render his own power absolute.[442]

Louis indeed was a test-case of Tacitean historiography, drawn with remarkable acuteness, accuracy and impartiality by Philippe de Commynes, one of the founders of the new politically realistic historiography of which Machiavelli and Guicciardini were representatives. Both Montesquieu and Voltaire had portrayed the character of Louis within the Tacitean tradition of close political character scrutiny. Montesquieu, indeed, had performed a close comparison of the characters of Tiberius and Louis, in which he had located their similarities in their secrecy, dissimulation, and power:

> Ils mirent leur gloire dans l'art de dissimuler. Ils établirent une puissance arbitraire. Ils passèrent leur vie dans le trouble & dans les remords, & la finirent dans le secret, le silence & la haine publique.[443]

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[442] HCV, I, p. 116.

Tiberius was nonetheless superior to Louis, in the control of his passions, in his comparatively late degeneration into vice, in his methods of controlling others, and in his possession of "*profondeur*" rather than the "*finesse*" of Louis. Voltaire had, typically, been more forthright than Montesquieu:

> Must he, to the confusion and humiliation of virtue, deserve to be considered as a great king?[444]

Voltaire however had conceded that even "a bad man can promote public good, where private interest is not concerned".[445] This is where Montesquieu was more discriminating:

> Celui-ci [Tiberius] laissoit toujours dans le même état les choses qui y pouvoient rester; l'autre [Louis] changeoit tout avec une inquiétude & une légèréte qui tenoit de la folie.[446]

Robertson, less interested in passing judgement than either Montesquieu and Voltaire, and not French, was able to portray Louis more benignly and with a greater sense of detachment. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that Louis lacked Tiberius' sense of moderation and caution:

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[443] Montesquieu, Oeuvres Complètes, III, pp. 538-539.
[444] Voltaire, The Universal History and State of all Nations from the time of Charlemain to Lewis XIV (Edinburgh, 1758), II, p. 58.
[445] Voltaire, Ibid., p. 63.
[446] Montesquieu, Ibid., p. 539.

> Subtle, unfeeling, cruel, a stranger to every principle of integrity, and regardless of decency, he scorned all the restraints of which a sense of honour or the desire of fame imposes even upon ambitious men.[447]

So, in a sense, Louis' character was even beyond the normal constraints of ambition: he would naturally scorn to accept the limitations placed upon him by the feudal constitution. Robertson's character of Louis maintained a careful balance between the claims of the universal 'type' of tyrant, and the creation of a new pattern and model for kingship. He is urged on to his schemes by that "jealousy natural to tyrants": thus, his actions can be explained easily by reference to conventional stereotypes. Nonetheless, Louis represents for Robertson a form of modernity. The descriptors that Robertson uses for him, while to an extent transhistorical, prefigure Robertson's depiction of Charles, and introduces a language that it is not appropriate to apply to the middle ages:

> Sagacious, at that time, to discern what he deemed his true interest, and influenced by that alone, he was capable of pursuing it with a persevering industry, and of adhering to it with a systematic spirit, from which no object could divert and no danger could deter him.[448]

As we have seen, as well as tyranny, sagacity was the portion of men in every age, but discernment of 'interest', and a 'persevering' and 'systematic' adherence to that interest was not a characteristic feature of the feudal government. As we shall see, even in the age of Charles V, the language of system and interests is applied to very few characters beyond

[447] HCV, I, p. 116.

Charles himself, although it is Robertson's purpose to show how it is spreading throughout Europe. Louis is important as a model for action and an instructor of other monarchs. His example changes the features of kingship, shifts them away from a chivalric to a political model: "he first taught other princes the fatal art of beginning their attack on public liberty".[449] Although Louis' qualities seem to be general, they have a resonance and significance throughout the text that can only be understood in the precise context of the late middle ages, and in Robertson's textual placement. He embodies the rebirth of the active and enterprising features of the human character, or more precisely the reactivation and redirection of them towards new and larger objects:

> But fatal as his administration was to the liberties of his subjects, the authority which he acquired, the resources of which he became master, and his freedom from restraint in concerting his plans as well as executing them, rendered his reign active and enterprising. Louis negotiated in all the courts of Europe; he observed the motions of all his neighbours; he engaged, either as principal or as an auxiliary, in every great transaction; his resolutions were prompt, his operations vigorous; and upon every emergence he could call forth into action the whole force of his kingdom.[450]

Louis thus combines together in his one person the resolution of all the problems of writing European history. The 'fatality' of his obliteration of the liberties of his subjects is obscured

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[448] HCV, I, p. 116.
[449] HCV, I, p. 119.
[450] HCV, I, p. 121. Robertson may well have taken as a hint of the breadth of Louis' interests, and the scale of his ambitions, the testimony of Commynes that "he seemed better qualified to rule the world than a single kingdom"- because of his vigilance in encompassing variety of objects- "he remembered everything and recognized everybody, both from his own country and from every other one": Memoirs (trans. Michael Jones; Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 410.

in Robertson's breathless and excited enumeration of Louis' political and supremely narrative qualities. The adjective 'fatal' is always balanced by a superior political trait:

> The maxims of his administration were as profound as they were fatal to the privileges of the nobility.[451]

His achievement demonstrates to the world the fragility of the domination of the nobility, once confronted by an opponent capable of organising his motives and harnessing his arts to work upon what Montesquieu had called the "*foiblesse*" of his enemies:

> ...all the arts of intrigue, all the mysteries and refinements of his fraudulent policy were employed, and with such success, that at a juncture which required the most strenuous efforts, as well as the most perfect union, the nobles never acted, except during one short sally of resentment at the beginning of his reign, either with vigour or on concert.[452]

Louis reveals the ineffectual nature of the passionate politics of resentment that served as the pattern for medieval action. He unites all the princes of Europe by providing them with both a pattern which they should follow, and by instructing them with the maxims which they should internalise: "The example which Louis set was too inviting not to be imitated by other princes".[453] Louis is clearly an exceptional figure, who seems to awaken the kingdoms of Europe from a collective enchantment, but his revival of the "spirit and vigour" of the

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[451] HCV, I, p. 116.
[452] HCV, I, p. 118.
[453] HCV, I, p. 121.

European nations operates mechanically once he sets it in train, through emulation and the infection of example, and also as a defensive reaction by the other powers of Europe. In contrast with Charlemagne's situation, the times are propitious for the sort of intervention that Louis makes. Indeed, unlike Charlemagne, Louis is far from being a heroic figure: his use of the tricks of artifice and refinement, his indulgence in "scenes of treachery, falsehood and cruelty", these were aspects of Louis' character that Robertson could not and would not choose to ignore. Robertson concedes that Louis' actions were "unworthy of a great monarch", a plaint that he would repeat a number of times in the case of Charles V, and he takes a certain delight in pointing out the frustrations of Louis' intentions through his adoption of inappropriate methods, and their ironic consequences.[454] Nonetheless Robertson's moralism is limited, as it is in the case of Charles V, by the sheer importance of Louis' character, and its role in transmitting the new maxims of policy that reconfigure European history.[455]

After Louis' departure from the scene, the events of Europe gather momentum, and a multiplicity of actors appear on the scene and jostle for position. The monarchs of Europe begin to encounter each other upon "a new theatre of action", Italy, and to try out upon each other their new-found power and vigour. The end of section II resembles much more a narrative of events, with the major figures Ferdinand of Aragon, Louis XII, and Julius II growing to awareness of their place within a system of relations. Nonetheless there are

[454] HCV, I, p. 128: "Thus Louis, by the caprice of his temper, and the excess of his refinements, put the house of Austria in possession of this noble inheritance".
[455] Compare with Walter Scott's portrait of Louis XI in *Quentin Durward*, which must surely have been influenced by Robertson.

differences in the type of actions related in this introductory section, and those of the main narrative:

> ...so different were the efforts of the states of Europe in the fifteenth century from those which we shall behold in the course of this history, that the army with which Charles [VIII of France] undertook this great enterprise did not exceed twenty thousand men.[456]

The exertion of force is as yet faltering and uncertain, yet this comparatively negligible power creates astonishing effects, especially in revealing to the powers of Europe the enormous potentialities of the new power that monarchs can possess. It is at this point that the "progress of ambition" expands with tremendous rapidity, that the ambitions and operations of princes outstrip the ability of the institutional infrastructure to cope with it. The remarkable speed at which events move and change in this period is conveyed by Robertson with breathless excitement, yet his purpose is to focus the reader's attention upon the events to come, and the new pattern which they assume:

> Those active scenes which the following history will exhibit, as well as the variety and importance of those transactions which distinguish the period to which it extends, are not to be extended solely to the ambition, to the abilities or to the rivalship of Charles V and Francis I. The kingdoms of Europe had arrived at such a degree of improvement in the internal administration of government, and princes acquired such command of the national force which was to be exerted in foreign wars, that they were in a condition to enlarge the sphere of their operations, to multiply their claims

> and pretensions, and to increase the vigour of their efforts. Accordingly, the sixteenth century opened with the certain prospect of abounding in great and interesting events.[457]

Yet this process still requires elaboration, and although the shape of events is not entirely attributable to Charles and Francis, they are the motor which powers the new system and which spreads its influence throughout Europe. The *View* tells us how the powers of Europe had begun to adapt to the spectacle of encroaching ambition, by discovering the "great secret in modern policy", the formation by necessity of a regular system of co-operation and counteraction.[458] It is the narrative that displays the process in action, and shows precisely how the powers of Europe are forced to adapt their views, interests and characters at the hands of a master politician.

Charles V: Character as System

To the eighteenth century mind, the figure of Charles V was still dominated by the notion of universal monarchy, and the political theories which it had spawned in the preceding two centuries.[459] Thus, Charles V represented to its greatest possible degree the abstract principle of ambition. Since ambition was, as Adam Smith had pointed out, the usual vice of monarchs, this did not appear sufficiently to distinguish Charles from the mass of tyrants and

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[456] HCV, I, pp. 130-131.
[457] HCV, I, p. 145.
[458] HCV, I, p. 134: "Self-preservation taught other powers to adopt it. It grew to be fashionable and universal".
[459] See John Robertson, 'Empire and Union: Political Thought and the Union of 1707', in John Robertson (ed.), A Union for Empire: Political Thought and the Union of 1707 (Cambridge University

conquerors who had disfigured history with their crimes, and perpetually disturbed the peace of mankind.[460] Robertson, indeed, had used him in his dedication to George III as a representative of all the destructive forces of ambition which George III had rightly eschewed in favour of the "blessings of peace":

> History claims it as her prerogative to offer instruction to KINGS, as well as to their people. What reflections the reign of the Emperor Charles V. may suggest to your Majesty, it becomes not me to conjecture. But your subjects cannot observe the various calamities, which that Monarch's ambition to be distinguished as a Conqueror, brought upon his Dominions, without recollecting the felicity of their own times, and looking up with gratitude to the their sovereign, who, during the fervour of youth, and amidst the career of victory, possessed such self-command, and maturity of judgement, as to set bounds to his own triumphs, and prefer the blessings of peace to the splendour of military glory.[461]

Elsewhere Robertson had made it clear that he attributed the perpetual discord and agitation of the age principally to the excessive ambition of Charles V. Yet Robertson's tone was far less condemnatory of Charles than many of his contemporaries would have wished. For instance, the Abbé Genty, in linking Charles' European ambitions with the depredations of the Spanish in America, was able to condemn Charles as a vicious warmonger, "un Desposte enivré de sa gloire & jaloux de son autorité", who had used the wealth plundered from

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Press, 1995), pp. 4-32 on the continuing legacy of Charles V's Imperial ideal, and its particular relation with Scottish politics.

[460] Adam Smith, Theory of Moral Sentiments (New York, 1966), pp. 70-82: "Of the origin of Ambition". Smith traced here the problems that "the Great" encountered in attempting to comport themselves on a public stage with exact propriety.

[461] HCV, I, unpaginated dedication 'To the King'.

America in order "à troubler l'Europe & à la remplir de dueil & de carnage" with "ses caprices & projets ambitieux":

> Et nous admirons les vastes combinaisons de sa politique! Et nous tombons aux pieds des Statues quel la flatterie lui érige! Et nous formons un concert immortel de louanges pour célébrer sa puissance & ses victoires". [462]

This apostrophe was probably aimed at the readers of Robertson's history. Despite Robertson's avowed disapprobation of Charles' career, Genty and Robertson did not share a common moral tone: Robertson's admiration for Charles' *politique* was all too evident. For Robertson, Charles was neither a uniquely evil figure, nor simply another in an endless list of tyrants and conquerors who had disfigured history with their ambitions and designs. Indeed, Robertson explicitly dissociated Charles from the protagonists of such histories, Alexander, Genchizchan and Tamerlane.[463] Nonetheless, the tenacity of this model of history, as well as the inappropriateness of its application to Charles, was demonstrated by Robertson in his relation of the surprised reaction of Italians to their first glimpse of the man who had sacked Rome:

> ...having been so long accustomed to form in their imagination a picture of Charles which bore some resemblance to that of the barbarous monarchs of the Goths or Huns, who had formerly afflicted their country with like calamities, were surprised to

[462] L'Abbé Genty, L'influence de la Découverte de l' Amérique sur le bonheur du Genre-Humain (Paris, 1788), pp. 62-63. Of course, in Robertson's account, the connection between Charles and the *conquistadores* of America, insisted upon by Genty, and the reversion back to a barbaric model of history, was diminished by Robertson's decision to write a separate *History of America*.
[463] HCV, IV, p. 303.

> see a prince of a graceful appearance, affable and courteous in his deportment, of regular manners, and of exemplary attention to all the offices of religion.[464]

Robertson indicated at intervals in the text Charles' assumption of the "pomp and power of a conqueror", and for Robertson this was a clear sign of the failure of Charles, especially in moments of success, to maintain his artful and moderate policy.[465] When Charles became a mere 'conqueror', he fell below the standards of his "general' character":

> ...that prudent recollection, that composed and regular deportment so strictly attentive to decorum, and so admirably adapted to conceal his own passions, for which he was at all other times so conspicuous.[466]

More often, Charles embodied in his political actions and calculations the notion of 'propriety', and it is this which renders the *History of Charles V* both complex and fascinating. It also explains why it can only be understood through a full narrative reconstruction, in order to comprehend fully the precise conditions in which Charles was compelled to operate. As Robertson explained, at the beginning of Charles' confrontation with the German Protestants:

> In order to understand the propriety of the steps which he took for that purpose, it is necessary to review the chief transactions in that country since the diet of Ratisbon...[467]

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[464] HCV, III, pp. 37-38.
[465] HCV, III, p. 37.

Charles was very much a modern monarch, whose manipulation of appearances and the arts of decorum confounded expectations of the character to be expected from a conqueror, and whose judicious application of "moderation and equity" confused the assessments of contemporaries, and prevented them from acting effectually against him. Perhaps more importantly, in the very different political environment of modern Europe, Charles' ambition, although "rapacious", was frustrated and unfulfilled, and its manifestations were modified and restrained by the 'balance' of Europe, and by the need to interact with a variety of states. Charles therefore does not conform to the historiographical stereotype of the conqueror: he is required to pursue his ambition by very different means, and the military option is only one of a number of avenues that Charles explores. It is important for Robertson's purpose that Charles himself is not principally a 'military' character: his conduct was required to be something much more than the "irregular sally" of a military adventurer. Charles' ambition, as much as Charles' kingship, is a modern phenomenon, and cannot be discussed in the same way as the conquerors and monarchs of the past.[468] For Robertson, therefore, Charles' character was more than merely a site of reflexive moral evaluation: as a profoundly 'new' character, one entrenched in the conditions of political action traced in section II of the *View*, his precise contours could only be understood by sustained historical narrative treatment. In the words of Montesquieu, Charles V signified "un nouveau genre de grandeur", and

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[466] HCV, III, pp. 127-128. Robertson also appeals to Charles' character to defend him from the claim that he poisoned the Dauphin: "unblemished by the imputation of any deed resembling this in atrocity": HCV, III, p. 142.

[467] HCV, III, p. 255.

[468] Here Robertson also dissented from the laudatory views of the Spanish historians Miñana and Sandoval, his principal narrative sources on Charles' Spanish exploits. For Miñana, for instance, Charles was a conventional heroic figure, eventually overcome by the forces of fortune, and superior to the age in which he lived: Continuacion de Historia General de España por Juan de Mariana (Barcelona, 1839), pp. 496-500.

therefore for Robertson he required a new means of presenting the abstract and ahistorical themes of ambition and conquest.[469] In Robertson's scheme, therefore, Charles V was not merely an embodiment of the 'ruling passion' of all monarchs in all ages, ambition.[470] Rather, he was the culmination of the 'progress of ambition', the means by which the new form of ambition and political action were understood and spread throughout Europe. The narrative is the necessary and only means of recounting this process, which involves complex and detailed interactions.

In the *History of Scotland*, Robertson had been more critical of Charles: he "openly aspired to universal monarchy", the acquisition of power was described as his "only object of desire", and one which he "pursued with an unwearied and joyless industry". Charles' character was submerged in ambition, and his actions dictated by the compulsive nature of that domineering passion. His relentless pursuit of ambition had served to erase his private character, leaving only the political remaining: this helped to explain the extraordinary unity of his character, but it was a unity attained only at the expense of balance and composure. Thus, the new "new vein of wealth" opened up to Charles is consumed greedily by the "extravagance of ambition".[471] The dangerous moral consequences of Charles' passionate and narrow ambition is contrasted with Francis' more accommodating version of the same passion:

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[469] Montesquieu, 'Réflexions sur la Monarchie Universelle en Europe', Oeuvres Complètes (ed. André Masson, Paris, 1955), III, p. 374.

[470] See, for instance, Karen O'Brien, Narratives of Enlightenment, pp. 142-143: "Robertson's Charles V, like Voltaire's Louis XIV, is a shadowy figure without any clear motivation beyond his ruling passion of 'ambition', and his public persona is wholly absorbed into his public character...a one-dimensional presentation of Charles as Ambition personified". O'Brien claims that as a result Robertson is at a loss to explain why Charles abdicated. In fact, Robertson seems distinctly unembarrassed at offering an explanation that avoids the glib and pious accounts offered by previous historians.

> Francis could mingle pleasure and elegance with his ambition; and though he neglected some advantages, which a more phlegmatic or more frugal prince would have improved, an active and intrepid courage supplied all his defects, and checked or defeated many of the emperor's designs.[472]

In *Charles V*, however, Charles' ambition is presented in a different way. Robertson denies that there is any evidence that Charles was seeking to establish a universal monarchy: such a chimerical and unattainable object would not have accorded with Charles' astute sense of political realities.[473] Although Robertson asserts at several points that ambition or "love of power" is Charles' ruling passion, the term 'ruling passion' itself is diversified: Charles has different particular ruling passions at different stages of his career. In the narrative treatment of Charles' actions, a sequence of temporary ruling passions interpose as circumstances dictate, relating to the different objects of his ambition at different times and in different situations. Thus, ambition, while it remains the *general* motivating force of Charles' character, is particularised and contextualised throughout the texture of the narrative. The notion of a 'ruling passion' is therefore deepened significantly by its context in a field of competing interests: the precise manifestation of Charles' ambition is more important than any general heading. What is striking about Charles' ambition is not its vastness and sheer scale, for as we have seen the ambition of a barbarian chief was also characterised by its vastness. Rather, it is the diversity of objects and the variety of interests that Charles' ambition accommodates that distinguishes him from all previous statesmen. The idea of a

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[471] HS, I, pp. 91-92.
[472] HS, I, p. 92.

single monolithic principle of ambition loses its meaning and force in a narrative where the variety of objects on which Charles' ambition could alight is so large and unpredictable. Charles' ambition is therefore very precisely located in the state of Europe in the sixteenth century. In addition, Charles' ambition is seen to be a highly relative concept. At each stage of his career, it is both magnified and diversified, and undergoes a constant process of elaboration: his "ambitious views enlarged in proportion to the increase of his power and grandeur".[474] By the end of his reign, Charles' ambition has been stripped of its practicability and hard-headed attachment to *realpolitik*, and has become both vast and chimerical. Thus, *Charles V* in part traces the passage of ambition from a realistic and attainable animating principle to a mere dream or illusion.

If the nature of Charles' ambition resides partly in his natural temper, its precise manifestations are connected more closely with his situation and context. His hereditary possessions are scattered and diverse, but they position Charles very securely at the heart of Europe. It is the extent of Charles' territories that dictates the scope of Charles' interests, and which provides him with the materials upon which his ambition can feed. Even lacking the motivation of ambition, Charles would have been forced to intervene to an unprecedented level in the affairs of many states of Europe, simply to defend the interests of those realms he possessed or represented.[475] It is with his election to the Imperial dignity that Charles' ambition takes on that particular form that dictates the course of the narrative:

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[473] HCV, IV, p. 288: "there seems to be no foundation for an opinion prevalent in his own age, that he had formed the chimerical project of establishing an universal monarchy in Europe".
[474] HCV, III, p. 51.

> Then it was that those vast prospects, which allured him during his whole administration, began to open, and from this aera we may date the formation, and are able to trace the gradual progress, of a grand system of enterprizing ambition, which renders the history of his reign so worthy of attention.[476]

Its true nature can only be fully understood, however, in the context of the new developments within the states of Europe. Charles' position locates him at the centre of a network of interacting, competing states whose capacity to impact upon each other has been greatly enhanced. Ironically, however, Charles is elected primarily because this important truth is only imperfectly understood:

> The other European princes could not remain indifferent spectators of a contest, the decision of which so nearly affected every one of them. Their common interest ought naturally to have formed a general combination, in order to disappoint both competitors, and to prevent either of them from obtaining such a pre-eminence in power and dignity, as might prove dangerous to the liberties of Europe. But the ideas with respect to a proper distribution of and balance of power were so lately introduced into the system of European policy, that they were not hitherto objects of sufficient attention. The passions of some princes, the want of foresight of others, and the fear of giving offence to the candidates, hindered such a salutary union of the powers of Europe, and rendered them either totally negligent of the public safety, or kept them from exerting themselves with vigour in its behalf.[477]

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[475] Even the "feeble and unsteady" Maximilian was capable of rendering the office of emperor formidable on occasion.
[476] HCV, II, p. 78.

This interaction is therefore as yet imperfect and limited, confined still to the contiguity of states with each other: Europe still does not constitute a unified community of action. The various powers of Europe fragment into particular passions which intrude between them and their common interests, and prevent them from developing the necessary unity, vigour or accurate discernment to combat the ambitions of Charles. It is Charles who, by his actions throughout his reign, instructs the princes of Europe in the importance of general combinations to counteract the efforts of a vigorous, purposeful and sagacious prince capable of bringing all of them within the web of his interests, ambitions, and actions. Robertson's use of spectatorial imagery, a favoured stylistic feature, is suggestive here: once the princes of Europe are capable of observing Charles' motivations more fully, then they can move from mere spectators to actors. This difficulty of moving from discernment to unified action is dramatised by the situation of the Protestant princes in their struggle against Charles. As Robertson says, the Protestants "were not inattentive or unconcerned spectators of the motions" of Charles.[478] They have acquired the skills of observation so necessary to the circumstances of modern Europe, but they are incapable of managing the transition from the perception of their interests to the unified exercise of action against Charles:

> Happily for himself [Charles], the union of the several members in this great system was so feeble, the whole frame was so loosely compacted, and its different parts tended so violently towards separation from each other, that it was almost impossible for it, on any important emergence, to join in a general or vigorous effort.[479]

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[477] HCV, II, p. 68.
[478] HCV, III, p. 303.
[479] HCV, III. pp. 320-321. See also HCV, III, p. 344, in which the Protestant army is described as "a vast machine whose parts are ill-compacted, and which is destitute of any power sufficient to move and regulate the whole" which "acted with no consistency, vigour or effect".

Through the influence that he exerted over all the nations of Europe, principally the fear that his ambition inspired in them, all the states of Europe came to feel that they were connected to a single system, dominated by the need to protect themselves from the consequences of Charles' actions. More narrowly, each prince would have to build into his political calculations an assessment of the relationship of his own schemes to Charles' interests and intentions. Robertson's adoption of Charles as the structural unity of the work is therefore not accidental: it embodies a recognition that Charles was the cement of the emergent states-system.

The growing unity of Europe as a subject for historiography is reflected in and reinforced by the unity of Charles' character. If the extent and diversity of his territories entrenched him at the heart of Europe they also presented him with the problem of imposing unity of purpose and action upon several distinct and very different political entities. Indeed, Charles' entire career could be viewed as a struggle against the tendencies towards diffusion and fragmentation inherent in the variety of his interests. This is reflected in the structure of the work: Charles is required to be always on the move, to balance and weigh his interests, and to shift his scene of action in response to new events. In the rapid shifts of scene from Spain, to Hungary, to Africa and Germany, it is only the wide sweep of Charles' vision, or alternatively the diversion of his attention, that acts as the link in the transitions of the narrative. Each state imposed a different role upon Charles, different expectations of the purpose and limits of his powers, and a different set of manners with which he was required to accommodate himself. This is clear at the beginning of his reign, with the tension between Charles' Flemish advisers and his Spanish subjects. Charles' attempts to impose his authority

upon each of the territories ran into very particular and intractable centrifugal forces, resistant to the extension of Charles' power. To collect his diffuse forces into an effective functioning unity was beyond even Charles' abilities. However, the defects lie within the states themselves, in the ramshackle and cumbersome institutions of the German empire and the tenacious liberty and obstinate particularism of the Spanish kingdoms. There is a tension between the scale of his ambitions, and the localism of each of the states whose interests he attempts to juggle:

> ...the emperor found that the extent of his revenues was not adequate to the greatness of his schemes, or the ardour of his ambition.
>
> ...his prerogative in all his different states was so limited...[480]

The internal weaknesses and the very scattered and fragmented nature of his possessions could also have the effect of fragmenting and dissolving Charles' own ambitions, to divert his attention and waste his energies. To an extent, this is what happens: Charles is never able to collect the strength of his states together, he is constantly diverted from his efforts, and is required to be ever vigilant, constantly aware of the threats to his over-extended interests. Charles therefore works against enormous institutional constraints, and compensates for these external weaknesses through the exceptional unity of his character. In this, he contrasts directly with Francis I, whose passionate and irregular character squanders the advantages accorded to the French monarch, of an ordered, regular, compact and forceful national state

[480] HCV, II, pp. 282-283, p. 286.

structure. Unlike Francis, Charles is able to subordinate his diversity of interests to a regular *system* of conduct and action:

> Charles's measures, instead of resembling the desultory and irregular sallies of Henry VIII or Francis I, had the appearance of a consistent system, in which all the parts were arranged, all the effects were foreseen, and even every accident was provided for.
>
> Charles's measures, being the result of cool reflection, were disposed into a regular system and carried on upon a concerted plan.[481]

The systematic nature of Charles' conduct was the factor which distinguished Charles above all of the other princes in Europe, and it was this which enabled him to combine his grandeur of vision with realistic and practical politics. It was, as Robertson claimed, the product of an ideal marriage of situation with temper:

> Charles, inclined by temper as well as obliged by his situation, concerted all his schemes with caution, pursued them with perseverance, and observing circumstances and events with attention, let none escape that could be improved.[482]

Charles understands what Montesquieu termed the 'science des événemens', the ability to comprehend and foresee events, and an instrumental knowledge of men and objects which enables him to manipulate them in his own interest:

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[481] HCV, IV, p. 289.
[482] HCV, III, p. 31.

> ...Charles possessed in the most eminent degree the science which is of greatest importance to a monarch, that of knowing men and of adapting their talents to the various department which he allotted them.[483]

Charles' systematisation depends on both control of his own internal character, and on the penetration and manipulation of the characters of others. The first can be seen in Charles' elimination of passions from the formulation of his systems of policy. This he achieves by stepping outside the 'busy scenes' of the world, and retreating into the silence of his own breast:

> Born with talents which unfolded themselves slowly, and were late in attaining maturity, he was accustomed to ponder every subject that demanded his careful consideration with a careful and deliberate attention. He bent the whole force of his mind towards it, and, dwelling upon it with a serious application, undiverted by pleasure, and hardly relaxed by any amusement, he revolved it, in silence, in his own breast.[484]

A product in the first instance of diffidence, Charles transforms the creation of an autonomous 'space' for deliberation into an instrument of policy that reasserts his own freedom of rational action from the impulses of passion, and the distorting representations of advisers and courtiers. Robertson thus represents Charles' own effective control of policy as

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[483] Montesquieu, 'Réflexions sur le caractère de quelques princes et sur quelques événements de leur vie', in Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. III (ed. André Masson, Paris, 1955), pp. 537-551; HCV, IV, pp. 286-288.
[484] HCV, IV, pp. 286-288.

a triumph of the isolated intellect, a controlling mind capable of disengagement from the world, but equally capable of viewing that world with exceptional clarity and of perceiving clearly the connections that exist between all events and objects. This space therefore preserves the autonomy of Charles' character from disruption by the temporary dominion of irrational elements, and so maintains the essential unity of his political character. The force of Charles' mind, undiverted, can be brought to bear in its full vigour and unity. In a sense, despite his extensive use of ministers and generals, Robertson presents Charles essentially as a 'lone' character, isolated but possessing a concentrated force inaccessible to characters more closely embedded in the world of passions:

> Charles' motions, depending upon himself alone, were more brisk and concerted.

The distance of Charles' system of conduct from the world of passions can be seen in his emergence at the end of the cycle of resentment and rage experienced in the civil wars in Spain as a representative of the forces of "magnanimity" and moderation;[485] in the distance which he maintains, particularly in his early career, from the fermenting and volatile passions of warfare; and in his ability to turn his passions, destabilising as they were, into prudent conduct, which can be seen particularly in the "personal animosity" at the heart of his relationship with Francis, an animosity that was also grounded in genuine "opposition of interest".[486] Robertson constantly contrasts the supreme control that Charles has over his own internal motivations, with the unstable susceptibility of his opponents to be diverted from their essential interests by other considerations. While his opponents rely all too often on

[485] HCV, II, pp. 244-245.
[486] HCV, III, p. 393.

powerful but temporary animating factors such as zeal, not easily susceptible to control, Charles seeks to achieve his ends through his inflexible adherence to a particular system of conduct. This can on occasion create a rough equivalence or balance, as when Charles faces the Protestant league:

> ...it remained a doubtful point whether his steadiness was most likely to fail or their zeal to be exhausted.[487]

On most occasions, however, the "inflexible constancy" of Charles' actions, the combination of "prudence as well as firmness" which they exhibited, being grounded in a close and accurate scrutiny of the characters of men and the nature of their interests, will prevail over the operations of passion, however zealous or sincere.[488]

Through intense application and reflection Charles is able to possess mastery over both events and men. This exertion of the mind is the basis of his protean flexibility: as Robertson implies, this creates in Charles a sort of universal force of mind that can be turned in new directions and overcome whatever lies in its way: "his mind was so formed for vigorous exertions in every direction that he acquired such knowledge in the art of war, and such talents for command, as rendered him equal in reputation and success to the most able generals of the age".[489] However, it was in his capacity for "the artifices of intrigue and negotiation", again a result of the conjunction of the necessity of his situation with the "natural disposition" of his mind, that Charles really excelled, and which most strongly

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[487] HCV, III, p. 352.
[488] HCV, III, pp. 348-349.

marked his character.[490] His remarkable ability in the arts of address and refinement is underwritten by the secrecy of his character, and his capacity for long and deep reflection. Charles' triumph over his passions is also his triumph over the world, since while it gives him an insight into the distorting effect of the passions on others, it makes Charles himself difficult to read. His actions and responses are not the mechanical reactions of the passions, but the creative working out of a system: those who are incapable of following Charles' system are incapable of predicting his actions: they lack his comprehensive and totalising view of the world, and his secret knowledge of the connections between things. Thus, Charles observes the collapse of the Protestant league into several warring and conflicting passions as a predictable and predicted outcome, and one which he could modulate at will:

> Charles observed, with satisfaction, the workings of those passions in their minds, and counting on them as sure auxiliaries whenever he should think it proper to act, he found it, in the mean time, more necessary to moderate than to inflame their rage...Such was the situation of affairs, such the discernment with which the Emperor foresaw and provided for every event...[491]

It is significant that the source of Charles' power lies in the secrecy of his meditations, since crucial to his effective employment of his schemes is his Tacitean mastery of disguise and concealment. Robertson, typically, characterises his dissimulation as peculiarly systematic and controlled, a masterpiece of "profound and well-conducted dissimulation". The necessity

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[489] HCV, IV, p. 287.
[490] HCV, II, p. 307.
[491] HCV, III, p. 321.

for disguise is closely related to Charles' situation. Charles is subjected from an early age to the close and attentive scrutiny of all of Europe, especially by the sagacious and discerning statesmen of Italy. The nature of his situation, and the limitations placed on his power, require him to balance his interests, to assume an air of 'moderation' and to conceal his dangerous designs from the rest of Europe. With the "eyes of Europe" upon him, Charles needs to find some means of cloaking his intentions, in order to forestall "a confederacy of all Europe, which the progress of his arms and ambition, now as undisguised as it was boundless, filled with general alarm".[492] Despite the dangerous implications of his assumption of so many disguises throughout the narrative, Robertson explicitly defended him in terms of the situation in which he was placed, in particular the intricacy and complexity of the schemes in which he was entangled. In some ways, he was a victim of the evolving system of European politics: he was overwhelmed and nearly overcome by the machine which he had sought to control and manoeuvre. In this way, prudent disguise could degenerate into fraud and deceit:

> ...this opened to him such a vast field of enterprise, and engaged him in schemes so complicated as well as arduous, that, feeling his power to be unequal to the execution of them, he had often recourse to low talents, unbecoming his superior
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> talents, and sometimes ventured on such deviations from integrity as were dishonourable in a great prince.

[492] HCV, II, p. 317.

Nonetheless, Robertson assumed that disguise was essential to the kind of politics, based on reflection and system, in which Charles was engaged, and that in practical terms it was superior to the open and frank, but absurd, fluctuating, passionate and imprudent politics of Henry VIII and Francis I. Robertson therefore, in censuring Charles, nevertheless situated his conduct in terms of "that less rigid and precise morality by which Monarchs think themselves entitled to regulate their conduct". On occasion, Robertson conceded, he was led into actions that were "unbecoming the dignity of his character, and inconsistent with the grandeur of his views".[493] However, Robertson implies that there are other occasions in which disguise and dissimulation are consistent and indeed essential to such a character. Charles' dissimulation is also remarkably co-ordinated, and steadily and unwaveringly pursued: it is a "plan of dissimulation", or "a long series of artifice and fallacy". Charles' dissimulation is all the more effective, and indeed paradoxically so, given the widespread knowledge possessed by all of Europe that Charles is indeed dangerously ambitious. Again, in his dealings with the Protestant league, Robertson asserts that the Protestants observe all too clearly the tendencies of Charles' plans:

> All these things could not be transacted without the observation and knowledge of the Protestants. The secret was now in many hands; under whatever veil the Emperor still affected to conceal his designs, his officers kept no such mysterious reserve; and his allies and subjects spoke out his intentions plainly.[494]

[493] HCV, III, p. 188.
[494] HCV, III, p. 324.

Yet Charles' genius is shown to even greater lustre in the way in which he is able to continue elements of deception and artifice even after his intentions have been revealed, in order to confuse and disorient his opponents, and to open up the divisions between them:

> Gross as this deception was, and manifest as it might have appeared to all who considered the emperor's conduct with attention...by concealing, and even disclaiming any intention of this kind, he not only saved himself from the danger of being overwhelmed by a general confederacy of all the Protestant states, but he furnished the timid with an excuse for continuing inactive, and the designing or interested with a pretext of joining of him, without exposing themselves to the infamy of abandoning their own principles, or taking part openly in suppressing them. [495]

The admiration for such preternatural insight into the motives of men, and of the way in which they could be orchestrated, is abundantly present in Robertson's tone.

Indeed, Robertson censures Charles most vehemently when he lays aside 'the mask' (a stock Robertsonian image) and reveals his true sentiments: then he becomes an arrogant and impetuous conqueror. In a sense, the necessity for dissimulation implies a certain moderation, a balance of forces which imposes upon Charles that restraint and respect for decency, that propriety and prudence, which Robertson claims to see as such an important component of his character. The fissures in Charles' character are all most cruelly revealed when he no longer has a rival to counterbalance his power and authority, particularly after the battle of Pavia, the sack of Rome, and towards the end of his reign in Germany. In such

[495] HCV, III, p. 328.

cases, the pretence of moderation is soon revealed to be a farce, and cast aside.[496] When the arts of dissimulation are laid aside, only force remains. In a number of circumstances the necessity for "moderation and equity", and the observation of a proper "decency and respect", require him to step back from his assumption of the power and pomp of a conqueror".[497] The pace of the narrative imposes upon Charles the need to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances, and to move on from interest to interest, and consequently from role to role:

> ...the history of these Monarchs [Charles and Francis] abounds with such surprising transitions. From implacable hatred they appeared to pass, in a moment, to the most cordial reconcilement; from suspicion and distrust, to perfect confidence; and from practising all the dark arts of a deceitful policy, they could assume, of a sudden, the liberal and open manners of two gallant gentlemen.[498]

The irony is that the deception has been replaced only by the 'appearance' of amity. Charles' interests had moved on, and necessitated the adoption of a new set of appearances.

5. Francis I: The Politics of Impropriety

The contrast between Charles and Francis was the most obvious organisational feature of the history, and was already a part of the mythology surrounding the age. Hume had succinctly

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[496] For example, HCV, II, p. 306: his "pretensions to moderation and disinterestedness were soon forgotten".

[497] See for instance HCV, III, pp. 37-38 in which the reversion to moderation happens quickly. On one occasion this paradigm is reversed, and Robertson assumes the "tones of a conqueror" as part of a design to hide the weakness of his army: HCV, III, p. 27.

characterised them as "one the more amiable man, the other greater prince".[499] This familiar dichotomy in some senses replicated that of Mary and Elizabeth in the *History of Scotland*, touching on the similar themes of the relationship between statecraft and virtue, and private and public character. Robertson's attitude towards Francis, at first conventionally structured as a contrast between amiability and *politique*, underwent a change as a result of his narrative reconstruction of his ventures. What had been lacking from previous assessments of their character, Robertson judged, had been a "strict scrutiny into their abilities for government" arising from "an impartial consideration of the greatness or success of their undertakings".[500] This Robertson had supplied, and he was as a result determined to redraw Francis' character. The high regard in which Francis' political character had been held was due to the remarkable perpetuation of the memory of his personal qualities, by the scholars, artists and historians of his court.[501] Robertson concedes the undoubted potency of Francis' personal qualities:

> Francis, notwithstanding the many errors conspicuous in his foreign policy and domestic administration, was nevertheless humane, beneficent, generous. All who had access to him- and no man of merit was ever denied that privilege- respected and loved him. Captivated with his personal qualities, his subjects forgot his defects as a monarch; and, admiring him as the most accomplished and amiable gentleman in his

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[498] HCV, III, pp. 153-154.
[499] David Hume, The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688 (Indianapolis, 1983), III, p. 127.
[500] HCV, III, p. 395.
[501] Robertson's principal source on the character of Francis I was the *Mémoires* of Guillaume du Bellay, a French courtier, which represented Francis in suitably glowing terms: "Il estoit magnanime & genereux, amateur de bonnes lettres, lequel par son moyen a illuminé les tenebres d'ignorance", with an emphasis on his misfortunes and his superhuman struggle with fate: see Collection Universelle des memoires particuliers relatifs a l'Histoire de France (Vols 17-21; London, 1786), Vol. 21, pp. 278-279.

> dominions, they hardly murmured at acts of maladministration which in a prince of less engaging dispositions would have been deemed unpardonable.

The personal sway of Francis' private character would have been only a temporary 'illusion', "would have died away with the courtiers who bestowed it", had not Francis' reputation been perpetuated by the authors and men of letters whom he had so generously patronised, and by subsequent historians who had fallen under the spell of Francis' appellation as the 'father of letters'.[502] Robertson thus positions and even dramatises himself as the first historian with sufficient independence and spirit to reveal Francis as the inferior of his less amiable rival, and to separate an estimation of the man (and the patron) from an impartial view of Francis' character as a prince. By revealing Francis' political success to be an artefact perpetuated by an 'order of men', scholars and historians, whose interests it advanced, Robertson was cleansing history of another error in which it had become involved.

Robertson's reëstimation of Francis is of course part of his much larger project of re-evaluating Charles. The two characters are so intertwined that they are almost, in a sense, coterminous: what touches one cannot but affect the other. Robertson used Francis, as most previous historians had done, to cast a "striking light" upon the qualities of Charles, to throw it into relief. Where Robertson differed from them was in his refusal to employ Francis polemically, as a sentimental and heroic counterpoint to the excessively political Charles. Rather, Francis' failure to subordinate the private to the political, and indeed to separate these two aspects of his character, while it had laid the foundation of his predominantly fictitious glory, was symptomatic of his larger failure as a monarch. Francis is thus used by

Robertson as a means of revealing, by his limitations and imprudence, the effectiveness of the adaptation of Charles' character to the environment of the European stage. There is a rich irony in Francis' position as the heir of Louis XI, the instructor of the princes of Europe, as there is in Charles' descent from Charles the Rash, Duke of Burgundy. The basic historiographical dichotomy, between fiery impetuosity and cold calculation, inconsiderate imprudence and measured prudence, so acutely drawn in Commynes was re-presented in the *Charles V* at a deeper and more sustained level. The dialogue between individual character and strategic situation creates a more intricate balance of forces in Robertson's work:

> Their animosity was founded in opposition of interest, heightened by personal emulation, and exasperated not only by mutual injuries but by reciprocal insults. At the same time, whatever advantages one seemed to possess towards gaining the ascendant was wonderfully balanced by some favourable circumstance peculiar to the other. The emperor's dominions were of greater extent, the French king's lay more compact; Francis governed his kingdom with more power; that of Charles was limited, but he supplied the want of authority by address: the troops of the former were more impetuous and enterprising, those of the latter better disciplined and more patient of fatigue.[503]

Francis' possession of the strongest monarchy in Europe, compact, ordered, obedient and heavily taxed, enabled him to act with a force and power that Charles would never be able to match. However, Francis' inability to control or use effectively the powers at his command emphasises the triumph of Charles' character over the limitations of his position. The

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[502] HCV, III, pp. 395-397.
[503] HCV, III, p. 393.

difference of their respective situations was therefore balanced by the differences in their characters: "the success of their enterprises was suitable to the diversity of their characters, and was uniformly influenced by it".[504] The importance therefore of the relative assessment of their characters in explaining and accounting for the events of the age is therefore equal with the appreciation of their situations both within their own kingdoms and upon the larger stage of Europe. The almost miraculous balance of forces, both personal and public, which Robertson had in the *History of Scotland* ascribed to Providence, is perhaps more correctly analysed in *Charles V* as the failure of Francis' character to adapt to the new conditions of action required by the emergence of a European, supra-national community. The bare contrast between Charles' prudence and Francis' imprudence is however located within a larger context, which reveals the limitations of outdated forms of personal kingship and the potentially ossifying nature of inappropriate theatrical role-play.

Charles and Francis are radically distinct in the way in which they use and interact with the other actors within Europe. In some ways, Francis is represented as a more openly theatrical character than Charles, especially in his whole-hearted assumption of the role of a chivalric knight. Open and undesigning as Robertson represents him, Francis is nonetheless fond of the panoply of magnificence and display. In this, he is, as in other ways, strongly linked to the character of Henry VIII. Their joint exhibition of chivalric pageantry and monarchical showmanship, the Field of the Cloth of Gold, is one of the great scenes of the age, and Robertson duly accords it a place within his history. However, for Robertson it is a spectacle more "singular" than significant, more interesting for the light which it sheds on the, by implication, rather absurd manners of two of the most important monarchs in Europe, than in

[504] HCV, III, p. 394.

its political consequences. This is the weakness of both Francis and Henry, that while they set so much store on the crucial importance of appearances, and the need to manipulate them, their failure to perceive the underlying realities behind the spectacle means that they themselves are duped by their own appearances of splendour and greatness. Robertson implies that they are dazzled by their own grandeur:

> Both Francis and Henry loved the splendour of these spectacles too well, and were too much delighted with the graceful figure which they made on these occasions, to forego the pleasures or glory which they expected from such a singular and brilliant assembly.[505]

Nonetheless, the real transaction that takes place is not the grandiose exchange of visual symbols by Francis and Henry, but the silent yet perfect understanding of interests achieved by Charles and Wolsey:

> Whatever impression the engaging manners of Francis, or the liberal and unsuspicious confidence with which he treated Henry, made on the mind of that monarch, was soon effaced by Wolsey's artifices, or by an interview he had with the emperor at Gravelines, which was conducted with less pomp than that near Guines, but with greater attention to what might be termed political utility.[506]

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[505] HCV, II, p. 98.
[506] HCV, II, pp. 100-101.

Francis and Henry both misunderstand the nature of princely display. Instead of employing it as a means of disguise and artifice, it is used as a form of open and complete communication, a medium for the free exchange of the passions. It is this interchange that Charles fears:

> His chief solicitude at present was to prevent the intended interview with Francis, the effects of which upon two young princes, whose hearts were no less susceptible of friendship than their manners were capable of inspiring it, he extremely dreaded.

Francis, a prince who sought to gain trust and allegiance through his affability of manners, relied upon the effect of personal interchange, physical contact, communication through facial gestures, the spoken word, the confluence of the heart, in creating an essential sympathy in order to exercise his authority. Despite the potential effectiveness of this communion of hearts, it is Francis' reliance upon the personal effects of his 'engaging manners' that forces him to place too much importance on the 'personal interview' as a medium for political negotiation, based as it is upon Francis' naive assumption that a complete exchange of passions and sentiments between interlocutors is possible, beneficial and necessary. Thus, at several points in his career with Charles he believes that a personal interview will efface the differences between them, and establish a community of interest founded upon their mutual identity as princes. This hope is of course unfounded.[507] It does reveal, however, the limitations inherent in Francis' character, most importantly his lack of imaginative projection, of which his fondness for physical display is a part, which in turn limits the possibilities for interaction. Francis is confined to the world of visual and sensual display: the pomp of tournaments and the ostentation of courtly splendour appeal to his sense

of immediacy. For Francis, such demonstrations do not serve to hide, but to project his qualities upon the world, to advertise the essential truths of his character. However, the effect of both pompous ceremonies and of Francis' own manners can only be limited, confined as they are to the circle of courtiers who are permitted 'access' to Francis, and to those willing to be duped by such visual signs. Francis is the creature of courtly culture, and his reach diminishes dramatically the further he moves from the tiny sphere of the court, and the personal impact of physical presence. It is perhaps significant that Robertson by contrast scarcely locates Charles in a court: his actions are not shown to be mediated by such a cumbersome institution.[508]

The most obvious point of comparison between Charles and Francis lies in the nature of their perception of the objects around them, especially in their penetration of the motives and interests of others. As we have seen, this was an absolutely vital component of Charles' character, and enabled him to act and interact with a confidence and purpose unrivalled in Europe. Conversely, Francis' failure of political imagination is revealed in his inability to perceive the invisible interests of those with whom he would seek to establish alliances, being "unwilling to enter into the details necessary for adjusting their interests". Francis is thus defeated by the multiplicity and complexity of interests which require careful 'adjustment': he would rather abandon his allies than apply himself to such tortuous details. Depending on a model of authority that stresses the importance of personal attachment and fidelity, Francis does not realise how weak and temporary such forces are compared with the

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[507] Robertson gives no great weight to the few occasions upon which they do meet.
[508] Although we know from modern historians the full complexity of Charles' bureaucratic machine, as well as the court, Robertson is at no great pains to reveal the machinery of Imperial government: it is

regular operation of interest. Francis is therefore unable to move outwards effectively, onto the stage of Europe, because he is unable to work on the minds of the various groups within Europe. While Francis argues and negotiates, Charles silently acts:

> While Francis endeavoured to explain and assert his title to it by arguments and memorials, or employed various arts in order to reconcile the Italian powers to the thoughts of his regaining footing in Italy, his rival was silently taking effectual steps to prevent it.

Francis mistakes the noisy interaction of physical bodies for the real activity within Europe; Charles is aware that this occurs in the invisible and insensible alignment of interests. Francis adheres to his passions and impulses as the guide to action, which prevents him from seeing the connections between his actions and others. Francis thus misunderstands the nature of the new interaction, which welds allies together not by the personal exchange of feelings, but through the invisible thread of interest, and binds people together who have no sympathy of manners. Charles, a character accustomed by necessity but also by his native political talents to seem to adapt himself to the manners of others, nonetheless appreciates the real communicative value of interest in creating grounds for common action, and works hard to maintain and knit together these delicate threads of interest:

> Charles, on the other hand, was attentive to the interest of every person who had adhered to him...This conduct, laudable in itself, and placed in the most striking light

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seen in Robertson's narrative to reside entirely in the person of Charles. In contrast, see Manuel Fernández Alvarez, Charles V: Elected Emperor and hereditary ruler (London, 1975), esp. pp. 50-54.

> by a comparison with that of Francis, gained Charles as much esteem as the success of his arms had acquired him glory.[509]

When Francis, convinced of the pressing need to ally with the Protestants, in fact does so, he endeavours to achieve it by "accommodating" himself to their predominant passion, "zeal for their religious tenets", as if through the visible exchange of passions he could disguise the real divergence of interests and belief that render the alliance in the long-term both unworkable and dishonourable.[510] Thus, unlike Charles' masterly adaptive skills, Francis is locked into a role that prevents him from acting effectively within Europe. His lack of observation is related to the limitations of his character. As Robertson emphasises, Francis judges of the actions and reactions of others by the yardstick of his own character:

> Judging of the emperor's heart by his own, he imagined that the sentiments of gratitude arising from the remembrance of good offices and liberal treatment would determine him more forcibly to fulfil what he had so often promised, than the most precise stipulations that could be inserted in any treaty.[511]

Although Robertson occasionally uses Francis' naiveté in order to make a moral point concerning the immorality of disguise, Francis' inability even to understand the possibility of disguise is regarded by Robertson as a sign of a supreme lack of projecting imagination or intellect. Thus, Francis' actions and judgements are shaped by the rigidity and inflexibility of

[509] HCV, III, p. 33.
[510] HCV, III, p. 111.
[511] HCV, III, p. 182.

his own character. Francis' lack of observation demonstrates fundamentally a lack of understanding concerning the nature of character and display on the European stage.

Francis displays time and again a fatal impropriety. Hurried on by the force of his immediate passions, he is incapable of adapting his behaviour or controlling his appearances in order to calculate their likely impact upon others. Thus, he is not capable of sustaining a character that is not rooted in passion and impetuosity. As Robertson observes, Francis' conduct in warfare was "more becoming a soldier than a general". Francis cannot control or dispose, he cannot, in other words, truly lead: he can only follow the torrent of his passions and therefore mingle with the other soldiers, become part of the mass of French chivalry. His too ready ability to identify himself with his people, his too easy harmonisation with their national manners, and his immersion in the cult of chivalry, all lead him to adopt the role of a 'gentleman'. Such an identity is not however worthy of a king, and indicates his loss of the character of monarch amidst his passions and inclinations. Francis is all too willing to allow himself to be submerged under larger categories- the chivalric ethos, French martial values- and is unable to provide himself with a space which allows him to stand back from these identities. This prevents him from acquiring the power to act separately from them. Francis is unable to play a role without losing himself within that role, a role which may be essential to his nature, but which disables him from fulfilling his most important prescribed function, that of prudent and effective monarch. Francis is so completely identified with French national character, that it is clear that he would not be able to step outside it, while Charles, initially a stranger to the character of the Spanish, uses his own adaptability as a tool for subordinating national character to his own supra-national ends:

> ...by his address in assuming their manners, in speaking their language, and in complying with all their humours and customs, he acquired an ascendant over them which hardly any of their monarchs ever attained, and brought them to support him in all his enterprizes with a zeal and valour to which he owed much of his success and grandeur.[512]

Charles is an outsider, but one who can enter into and manipulate the internal responses of those around him, and make them instruments of his will.

While modern historians assume that Francis' assumption of the role of chivalric monarch was a pose, a chosen identity which masked his shrewd political realism, Robertson takes Francis at face value, and believes that his chivalric identity was not only sincere but so deeply internalised that Francis had become its prisoner.[513] He was prevented from moving beyond that set of manners and code of behaviour, and taught to despise the artifices of negotiation. Thus, he lacks the necessary flexibility to take on a number of roles successfully: when, as a result of his fortune, he adopts the maxims of caution and hesitancy, against the bias of both his natural temper and his chivalric ethos, his pursuit of the path of negotiation is regarded by Robertson as both clumsy and ill-judged. He maintains his negotiations in the open, and cannot see beneath the surface. His approach to negotiation is characterised by Robertson as a "rage of negotiation": still passionate, obsessive, hasty, and

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[512] HCV, II, p. 245.

[513] La Curne de Sainte-Palaye had pointed out the curious fact that Francis was the fullest embodiment of chivalric values, at a time when chivalry as an institution was clearly on the decline, in his *Mémoires sur l'ancienne Chevalerie*, which Robertson had used as a key text in his construction of chivalry as a social institution.

ill-conceived.[514] Francis' character, from which it seems he cannot escape, transforms the suggestions of a word as neutral as 'negotiation' into a passionate uncontrollable force. Francis' greatest fault is that he cannot appreciate the abilities of others: locked into a consuming self-admiration, Francis cannot bring himself to employ as instruments of his policy any but those whose manners and talents agree with his own: an indictment of the concept of personal harmony by which Francis seeks to achieve so much. Thus, Francis' generals and advisors become reflections of himself, carrying out the same policies in the same manner:

> Bonnivet did not owe this preferment to his abilities as a general; for all of the talents requisite to form a great commander, he possessed only personal courage, the lowest and most common. But he was the most accomplished gentleman in the French court, of agreeable manners, and insinuating address, and a sprightly conversation; and Francis, who lived in great familiarity with his courtiers, was so charmed with those qualities, that he honoured him, on all occasions, with the most partial and distinguishing marks of his favour.[515]

This is the danger that lies within Francis' representative embodiment of French national chivalry, that it is a principle neither sufficiently varied nor variable. The greatest skill of Charles, by contrast, lay in his choice of fit instruments for the execution of his policies.[516] The character of Bourbon, as the one major actor to traverse the distance from the French

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[514] HCV, III, p. 392.
[515] HCV, II, p. 256. Amongst Francis' chosen instruments, the cautious, prudent, sagacious and elderly Montmorency was the great exception to this rule.
[516] HCV, IV, pp. 287-288: "his advantages over his rivals, are to be ascribed so manifestly to the superior abilities of his commanders whom he set in opposition to them, that this might seem to detract,

court to the Imperial service, provides Robertson with an opportunity to reveal the supreme skill of Charles in reading and adapting the passions of others to his own purposes, as Bourbon's resentment against the French crown becomes a component of Charles' network of motivation.[517]

Nonetheless, the interaction between Charles and Francis did serve to alter, or at least to cause them to deviate from their 'general' characters. Charles' prudence and caution, and his strict separation of private from public, deserted him when his personal animosity towards Francis warped and distorted his measures:

> If Charles and Francis had been influenced by considerations of interest or prudence alone, this, without doubt, must have been the manner in which they would have reasoned. But the personal animosity which mingled itself in all their quarrels had grown to be so violent and implacable that for the pleasure of gratifying it they disregarded everything else, and were infinitely more solicitous how to hurt each other than how to secure what would have be of advantage to themselves.[518]

Ironically, Charles, naturally perspicuous, and having studied the character of Francis for many years with deep insight, was less capable of seeing Francis clearly than many other characters, despite the transparency of Francis' character: he was "too apt to under-rate and

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in some degree, from his own merit, if the talent of discovering and steadiness in employing such instruments were not the most undoubted proofs of a capacity for government.

[517] HCV, II, pp. 250-255.

[518] HCV, III, p. 255.

despise the talents of his rival, because they differed so widely from his own".[519] Conversely, Francis, although this mingling of private with public was closer to Francis' character, was elevated by his struggle with Charles: it gave him a more persevering vigour and continuous concentrated purpose than Francis was normally capable of achieving. For both, however, the immense struggle introduces fissures in their set characters. The instability in Charles' character was related to the effect that Francis had upon him, importing private jealousies into a political character largely free of such distractions. In addition, Charles' vestigial tendency to parade himself in chivalric costume leaves him vulnerable to actions based on influences extrinsic to his political system. In his actions with Francis he is tempted to become a romantic hero, and so place himself outside the bounds of Robertson's political history: "more becoming the heroes of romance, than the two greatest monarchs of their age".[520] Nonetheless, as Robertson asserts on Francis' death, the gulf between the two characters is enormous, and this is related not only to Francis' addiction to pleasure, the cause of his death, but to his failure to break free from the dominion of passions and fortune. Although possessed also of ambition and enterprise, Francis' character is more frequently annexed to or placed alongside such controlling passions as resentment. For this reason, Francis falls back into a primitive and ineffectual pattern of history.

The Replication and Emulation of Character: Maurice of Saxony

Charles' defeat in Germany is the product of his own declining physical condition, and of the unravelling of the contradictions in Charles' political conduct. Structurally, it represents the

[519] HCV, III, p. 131.
[520] HCV, III, p. 14.

last act of Charles' ambition before it begins to focus on the crucial issue of succession for his son. In Germany, Charles overreaches himself by attempting to enforce a religious unity upon a disparate collection of states. In doing so, he fails to pay regard either to the religious sensibilities, or the acute sense of liberty possessed by the princes in the empire. Charles' inflexibility and arrogance, his refusal to act as anything other than a 'conqueror' towards nominally independent states, deepens the alienation felt between Charles and his subjects. Robertson uses the language of Spectatorial sympathy in order to dramatise the degree to which Charles lies outside the community of the German nation, and his failure, so contrary to his conduct in Spain, to adapt himself to the prejudices and interests of that nation. Thus, his response to the fate of the Landgrave of Hesse is markedly inappropriate:

> ...the eyes of all spectators were fixed on the unfortunate Landgrave; few could behold a prince, so powerful as well as high-spirited, suing for mercy in the posture of a suppliant, without being touched with commiseration, and perceiving serious reflections arise in their minds upon the instability and emptiness of human grandeur. The Emperor viewed the whole transaction with a haughty unfeeling composure...

Even the Landgrave's enemy, Henry of Brunswick, "lately the Landgrave's prisoner", was transformed into a compassionate "spectator of his humiliation".[521] Such a moment of communal feeling, a meditation of on the meaning of fortune, touches closely on the nature of history itself: the transformation of role that the abrupt reversal of fortune imposes is of course the primary, and sobering, lesson of humanist history. Charles' imperviousness to such moral lessons heightens the irony of his impending loss of that fortune which had

[521] HCV, III, pp. 419-420.

sustained him in his wars against Francis. The failure of Charles to join in the ritual of 'reconcilement' that the other princes indulge in is however a serious miscalculation, and the first sign of his approaching defeat. Charles' supposed aim in the empire, to act as a mediator and reconciler between the Protestant and Catholic princes is jeopardised by his inability to integrate himself into the German body politic: he is always the representative of an alien and outside force, and his increasing dependence upon brute power rather than the arts of politics in order to maintain his position is shown by Robertson to be unsustainable. This is in part because of the natural collapse of Charles' arts under the pressure of repetition and the close observation of all of his actions. Robertson, revealingly, illustrates the limitations under which Charles was increasingly constrained to act in his dealings with the Protestant German princes, restrictions on his freedom of action that were not as evident in the earlier parts of the narrative: "the Emperor was incapable of such uniform and thorough dissimulation as to hide altogether from their view the dangerous designs which he was meditating against them".[522] As we have seen, there were contradictions inherent in Charles' situation, as the master of dissimulation forced to practise under the prying eyes of all of Europe. Many of his arts, once used, are expended. The most crippling aspect of Charles' behaviour in Germany, however, is his "inflexibility", and this trait prevents him not only from adapting to the manners and sentiments of the German people, but also disables him from following the rapid and nimble movements of Maurice of Saxony. The character of Maurice is the most striking and in many respects, the most important to emerge in the later stages of the narrative. It is with Maurice's treachery that Charles' fortunes begin to turn, and more importantly it is in his encounter with Maurice that his discernment, foresight and control of events start to desert him.

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[522] HCV, III, p. 293.

Robertson not only uses the figure of Maurice in order to dramatise the decline of Charles as an effective political player, but also as a means of investigating the nature of political motivation. Robertson's presentation of Maurice's character pivots around two major revolutions in his internal motivations, and charts with extraordinary detail the changes in his perception of his own interests, and in his subsequent course of action. Both crucial junctures in Maurice's career are used by Robertson as the occasion for extended studies of the mixture of probable motivations operating upon Maurice at the time. Such an empathic focus on the internal deliberations of an actor was unusual even for Robertson, but it is this rich mine of motivation that presumably makes Maurice such an important and noteworthy figure in the panoply of characters that populate the *History of Charles V*:

> Of all the personages who have appeared in the history of this active age, when great occurrences and sudden revolutions called forth extraordinary talents to view and afforded them full opportunity to display themselves, Maurice may justly be considered as the most remarkable.[523]

Maurice was both "singular" in the variety, extent and grandeur of his qualities, and yet also fully representative of the age which defines him and enables him to act. In this way, and in many others, Maurice has a similarity to Charles that reinforces the themes of the narrative. Indeed, in his analysis of Maurice's character, Robertson is enabled to recapitulate many of his observations upon the conditions of political action that had been a feature of his examination of Charles' early career. However, by representing Charles in close interaction

[523] HCV, IV, p. 121.

with a character defined so very nearly in terms akin to the constituents of his own character, Robertson is able to move his analysis into new territory. The way in which Maurice may have self-consciously mirrored his performance upon Charles himself allows room for Robertson to make some moralistic observations on the self-defeating and self-cancelling nature of ambition, deception and all the political arts. More pertinently, Maurice illustrates with clarity the central message of *the History of Charles V*: the tendency of the events of the modern age to result in a balance of interests and forces, and a stasis of eventual outcomes. Maurice operates as a check not only upon Charles' ambition, but also succeeds in his labyrinthine contortions in cancelling out the actions of his own earlier manifestation as an ally of Charles. The appropriation by Maurice of the distinguishing characteristics of Charles dramatises the development of the emulative urge that erases the operational differences between characters, and erects at the level of the individual the equivalent of the balance of power.

Robertson's portrayal of the motives that induce Maurice to ally with the emperor has to contend with a tradition of Protestant Reformation historiography, represented by Sleidan and Seckendorf, that condemned his particular actions, the instability of his conduct, as the product of youth and, indeed, the fallen nature of man and earthly events, and which ultimately assimilated them into the explanatory scheme of divine Providence.[524] Robertson

[524] For Seckendorf, Maurice's earlier behaviour was an example of the weakness of human prudence in the face of Providence: Veit Ludwig von Seckendorf, Histoire de la réformation de l'église chrétienne en Allemagne, IV, p. 47: "Quoiqu'il semblat que cette manière d'agir du *Duc* fut désavantageuse à la Religion, la Providence s'en servit à la suite pour défendre cette même Religion, aussi bien que les *Libertés* de l'*Empire germanique,* & pour confondre les vues bornées de la Prudence humaine"; see also IV, p. 81: "Maurice étoit jeune, & l'on ne pouvoit être assuré de sa constance au point de ne pas craindre, que les artifices et les flatteries des ennemis de la Reformation, ne fissent beaucoup d'impression sur son esprit". Sleidan's history of the Reformation in Germany provided no more than a bare account of Maurice's actions and negotiations, with little hint of the workings of Maurice's

sees Maurice's disengagement from the Smalkaldic league as being, far from the result of the lightness and inconstancy of his age, rather the outcome of a mature and accurate discernment of the tendency of political events, and of his own determination to separate religion from the precise calculation of political interests: "being determined, as he said, to maintain the purity of religion...but not to entangle himself in the political interests or combinations to which it had given rise".[525] Maurice's behaviour is incomprehensible to his co-religionists, but it means that he preserves for himself a freedom of action and flexibility of manoeuvre that is denied to them. Maurice's aim to free himself from the constraints of action that religious affiliation seems to dictate arises from a sense that it is incompatible with his ambition and enterprising spirit. Maurice is observed initially as a young prince of "great talents", about to set out upon "Such a new and singular path as showed that he aimed from the beginning at something great and uncommon". Possessing foresight, Maurice predicts the rupture between Charles and the Smalkaldic league, and making a calculation based on interest and political considerations, he overcomes the prejudices natural to a Protestant, and

> ...instead of that jealousy and distrust which the other Protestants expressed of all the emperor's designs, he affected to place in him an unbounded confidence, and courted his favour with the utmost assiduity.

Therefore, Maurice inserts himself into the favour of the emperor, through his "insinuating address":

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internal motivations. Johannes Sleidan, The General History of the Reformation of the Church (London, 1689): see especially pp. 304, 380, 410, 528-9, 586.

[525] HCV, III, p. 256.

> ...the gracefulness of his person, his dexterity in all military exercises, together with his intrepidity, which courted and delighted in danger, did not distinguish him more in the field than his great abilities and insinuating address won upon the emperor's confidence and favour. [526]

Maurice distinguishes himself upon the more important battlefield, that of the mind and heart of Charles, and one of his notable achievements is to render Charles the object and not the subject of such a transaction, thus transforming the emperor from a supreme manipulator of the political world to the passive instrument of another's ambition and guile.

Yet the picture that the reader receives of Maurice in this early period is an unclear one. In some ways he is one of those enemies of the repose of mankind about whom Robertson occasionally moralised:

> Maurice...no sooner saw hostilities ready to break out...than vast prospects of ambition began to open to him.

> ...he perceived with pleasure the approach of civil war, as, amidst the revolutions and convulsions occasioned by it, opportunities of acquiring additional power or dignity, which at other times are sought in vain, present themselves to an enterprising spirit.[527]

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[526] HCV, III, pp. 256-257.
[527] HCV, III, pp. 352-353.

Maurice seems to be a turbulent and assuming spirit, whose chief care is to turn all events to his advantage, and who is willing to sacrifice any principle to the pursuit of his interests. Thus, his treaty with the emperor was a breach of his obligations of religion and honour:

> History hardly records any treaty that can be considered as a more manifest violation of the most powerful principles that ought to influence the human mind.[528]

Yet Robertson is careful to stress the difference in the language of description used about Maurice and his rival Albert of Brandenburg. Albert is also an adventurer seeking to profit from the chaos of the times:

> That prince, seeing himself at the head of such a number of desperate adventurers...soon began to disdain a state of subordination, and to form such extravagant schemes of aggrandizing himself as seldom occur, even to ambitious minds, unless when civil war or violent factions rouse them to bold exertions by alluring them with immediate hopes of success.[529]

Thus far, Albert and Maurice are, in Robertson's scheme, rough equivalents: both products of a process of civil fragmentation that has opened up to them ambitions of which they previously could not have conceived. Albert however remains throughout the narrative of his actions locked in a framework of reference that relates him to a discourse of 'barbarism': "he plundered with such wanton and merciless barbarity".[530] Albert's range of motivation is limited to an unstable commitment to, and an imperfect and narrow understanding of, his

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[528] HCV, III, p. 353.

immediate interest; and, ultimately to his passions. Neither set of motives make him an effective or stable actor:

> ...fluctuating in all the uncertainty of irresolution natural to a man who, being swayed by no principle, was allured different ways by contrary interest.[531]

> ...an ambitious prince who had no principle of action but regard to his own interest and no motive to direct him but the impulse of ungovernable passions.[532]

The difference in presentation between Maurice and Albert is immense. Maurice's actions, despite their apparent instability and discontinuity, can be accounted for in rational terms. Robertson emphasises the explicability of Maurice's motives, and even in his moralising on the perfidy of Maurice's treaty with the emperor, Robertson avoids an outright and unmitigated condemnation of Maurice. This is, no doubt, in part due to what Italian critics saw as Robertson's deliberate partiality in his account of the Reformation, but it is also a result of Robertson's especial vision of the nature of political action. One of the distinctions that can be made between Albert and Maurice is that the network of Maurice's motivation, its breadth and range, is so much more intricate and nuanced than Albert's; his vision,

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[529] HCV, IV, pp. 79-80.
[530] HCV, IV, p. 80.
[531] HCV, IV, p. 106.
[532] HCV, IV, p. 119. See also Robertson's treatment of other designing adventurers, such as "the restless and intriguing" Moronè or Martinuzzi. Robertson is both attracted by their enterprise, and appalled by their turbulence. For Moronè, see HCV, II, p. 185, pp. 311-317; for Martinuzzi, see HCV, III, p. 216-219; IV, pp. 46-51. Both are representative of the age: Moronè is "a man whose genius for intrigue and enterprize distinguished him in an age and country, where violent factions, as well as frequent revolutions, affording great scope for such talents, produced or called them forth in great abundance": HCV, II, p. 185.

likewise, is vast; and his actions are regulated and formed into a political system.[533] Above all, Maurice possesses the ability to manipulate appearances, a skill which primitive actors such as Albert can barely even comprehend. In this way, Robertson distinguishes Maurice from such blatant and shameless politicians as Moronè and Martinuzzi, and especially from such chaotic adventurers as Fiesco:

> Nor was the prince who ventured upon all this one of those audacious politicians who, provided they can accomplish their ends and secure their interest, avowedly disregard the most sacred obligations and glory in contemning whatever is honourable or decent. Maurice's conduct, if the whole must be ascribed to policy, was more artful and masterly; he executed his plan in all its parts, and yet endeavoured to preserve , in every step which he took, the appearance of what was fair and virtuous and laudable. It is probable, from his subsequent behaviour, that, with regard to the Protestant religion at least, his intentions were upright; that he fondly trusted to the emperor's promises for its security; but that, according to the fate of all who refine too much in policy, and who tread in dark and crooked paths, in attempting to deceive others he was himself deceived.

It is interesting to note that Robertson's assertion that Maurice is not an 'audacious politician' is grounded in Maurice's technical superiority in the arts of dissimulation and

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[533] The editors of the eighteenth century edition of Seckendorf, M.M. Junius and Roos, under the influence of Robertson's characterisation and in contradiction to Seckendorf, attributed Maurice's behaviour to a studied and consistent plan of action, carried out with absolute skill and timing and adhered to inflexibly: "Maurice s'étoit fait une système, qui ne se développe, que peu à peu". This was the character which they gave of Maurice in their 'Supplement' to Seckendorf's history, where Maurice's character is expressed in terms of his interior plans and reflections, his motions develop insensibly, are hidden beneath "un voile impénétrable", but are knitted together by a constant and consistent purpose. IV, footnote: pp. 47-8. For citations of Robertson on Maurice, see III, p. 429; IV, pp. 481-3; IV, p. 638; IV, pp. 678-9.

deception, his more complete and successful appreciation and management of appearances. He is described as a "perfect master of the art of dissimulation", despite his youth and inexperience. Similarly, the claim that Maurice is an *ingenue* who enters territory that he is unable to chart a straight path through, is not sustainable given the depiction in the narrative of Maurice as the absolute master of the political *métier* that he practises, possessed of a perfect understanding of the conditions of political action. If anyone is deceived, it is, of course and with rich irony, Charles himself. Nonetheless, in all these ways, Maurice's turbulence and ambition are controlled and rendered subject to purposive direction. Thus, Maurice more closely resembles the systematic pattern of action developed by Charles than the lawless irrationality of a mere adventurer.

Maurice's strategic control of appearances rescues him, in part, from infamy, because it is through his assumption of the role of mediator that he carves out a unique and indispensable position for himself in German politics. His decision to ally with the emperor is the fruit of his penetrative insight into both hostile camps, and his understanding of both of their positions enables him to move freely between one and the other, and to allay their suspicions and fears. In the end, he is the principle of political union around whom the entire German nation can unite:

> Although at one period of his life his conduct excited the jealousy of the Protestants, and at another drew on him the resentment of the Roman Catholics, such was his masterly address that he was the only prince of the age who in any degree possessed

> the confidence of both, and whom both lamented as the most able as well as faithful guardian of the constitution and laws of his country.[534]

This unity is achieved through political arts and through his skill in arousing trust, but Maurice is aware how fragile this unity is, and is unwilling to push it too far: he realises that he is the head of a "disjointed body", and that the conditions of unified and purposeful action could not be long sustained in the empire, especially against an enemy as resilient as Charles. It is Maurice's appearance of moderation that first attracts him to the notice of Charles, who is initially sensitive to the importance of conciliation and mediation in bringing about a settlement in Germany. Despite Maurice's own apparent fickleness, Robertson emphasises the underlying unity of Maurice's actions, his appreciation of the need to conciliate opinion, and pay attention to the niceties of decorum. This is one mistake that he detects in Charles' demeanour as events unfold, his unveiled communication of the arrogance of power and interest at the same time that he is attempting himself to mediate between competing claims. Robertson also recognises that Maurice retained, despite the illusions and appearances that he could conjure almost at will, a firm grip upon the underlying political realities. This is why Robertson dwells at such length on Maurice's beautifully handled transition from the camp of the empire to that of the Protestant princes: it provides an object lesson in the stage-management of the theatrics of political action.

Maurice's ambition connects him to the emperor in more than a merely general and abstract way. His decision to ally with Charles is driven by the vast ambition that orders his behaviour, and we witness as a result of his interaction the growth of that ambition until it is

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[534] HCV, IV, p. 122.

uncontainable and is no longer compatible with his position as a mere 'vassal' of Charles. The manner in which Maurice elects to join Charles is itself significant: it is the product of profound and searching introspection, of the kind that characterises Charles himself: "Having revolved all these things in his breast, and having taken his final resolution of joining the emperor". The two are joined in more than merely formal terms: Maurice adopts Charles as the pattern of his actions, if not as his unconditional master. Maurice's decision to ally with the emperor takes on the form of joining the world of prudence, calculation and policy. Maurice's proximity to the emperor provides him with both a schooling in the political arts, and a new and deeper appreciation of Charles' motives. Yet combined with that is a radical sense of the way in which Charles seeks to monopolise power and action. Maurice realises that by remaining as Charles' ally, he would condemn himself to the role of "tame spectator": this is inimical to Maurice's nature as an active spirit, but also to the new views of ambition and interest granted to him by Charles. Robertson traces the inevitable process whereby Maurice comes to regard Charles as the enemy to his own interests, and also to identify his own interests with those of the German polity as a whole, thus effecting a junction between private and public which explains how Maurice can emerge legitimately as the defender of German liberties:

> But his long and intimate union with the emperor had afforded him many opportunities of observing narrowly the dangerous tendency of that monarch's schemes. He saw the yoke that was preparing for his country, and, from the rapid as well as formidable progress of the imperial power, was convinced that but a few steps more remained to render Charles as absolute a monarch in Germany as he had become in Spain. The more eminent the condition was to which he himself had been

> exalted, the more solicitous did Maurice naturally become to maintain its rights and privileges, and the more did he dread the thoughts of descending from the rank of a prince, almost independent, to that of a vassal subject to the command of a master.
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> This resolution, flowing from the love of liberty or the zeal for religion, was strengthened by political and interested considerations. In that elevated station in which Maurice was now placed, new and more extensive prospects opened to his view.
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> ...Maurice neither wanted discernment to see the advantage of this pre-eminence, nor ambition to aim at attaining it.
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> His passions concurred with his interest in forming this resolution; and the resentment excited by an interest which he sensibly felt added new force to the motives for opposing the emperor which sound policy suggested. [535]

This internal dialogue between passions and interests, and also on a different level between public and private motives, are the irreducible possession of Maurice's unique combination of situation and ability. The reference that Robertson makes to Maurice's situation, his political vantage point, is crucial. The "vast prospects" which his proximity to the emperor open up to him alter the nature of his ambition, make it more commodious and voracious, and provide him with new perspectives on which Maurice's projecting imagination can play. In this way, Maurice takes on the tincture of Charles' own ambition, although on a smaller

[535] HCV, IV, pp. 10-13.

scale. Maurice's other perspective, the close observation of Charles' own motives, is the product of Maurice's address, the unusual degree of "intimacy" which he has attained with the emperor, and his penetrative discernment. In conjunction, they offer him insights which could be disclosed to no other German prince. Thus, it is not only Maurice's ambition that undergoes an evolution as a result of his interaction with Charles, but his views of his own interest, and his evaluation of his motives. Robertson depicts the process of Maurice's alienation from Charles as the natural outcome of a long process of internal deliberation, in which motives, public, private, interested, and passionate, intersect and reinforce each other. It is a mixture of motives that could exist in no one else, since only Maurice is in a position, and has the appropriate political skills, to read Charles' motives and character in such a manner. Robertson dramatises also the incentives towards inaction that would have characterised any other person:

> On the one hand, the connection which he had formed with the emperor was so intimate that he could scarcely hope to take any step which tended to dissolve it, without alarming his jealousy and drawing on himself the whole weight of that power which had crushed the greatest confederacy ever formed in Germany. On the other hand, the calamities which he had brought on the Protestant party were so recent, as well as so great, that it seemed almost impossible to regain their confidence, or to rally and reanimate a body after he himself had been the chief instrument in breaking its unity and vigour. These consideration sere sufficient to have discouraged any person of a spirit less adventurous than Maurice's. But to him the grandeur and the difficulty of the enterprise were allurements; and he boldly resolved on

> measures the idea of which a genius of an inferior could not have conceived, or would have trembled at the thoughts of the danger that attended the execution of them.[536]

Maurice's exceptionality overcomes the 'cold prudence' of the considerations that Robertson presents before the reader.

The corollary of Maurice's discernment is his own impenetrability. In order to deceive the emperor, the most discerning of monarchs, he must employ all the arts of disguise while making certain that Charles himself is not in the reciprocal position of observing and scrutinising Maurice:

> Maurice, that he might divert the emperor from observing their tendency too narrowly, and prevent the suspicions which that must have excited, saw the necessity of employing some new artifice in order to engage his attention and to confirm him in his present security.[537]

In Maurice's slow and careful emergence from the shadow of the emperor, Robertson reveals the self-conscious and deliberate role-playing of which Maurice's political action consists:

> Maurice had now to act a part entirely new; but his flexible genius was capable of accommodating itself to every situation. The moment he took arms, he was as bold and enterprising in the field as he had been cautious and crafty in the cabinet.

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[536] HCV, IV, p. 12.
[537] HCV, IV, p. 43.

Maurice's betrayal of the emperor involves a series of dramaturgical decisions by Maurice: which 'part' should he act; at what point should he cast aside the mask, and reveal his new intentions; how best could he maintain an equivocal appearance in order to confuse and paralyse the enemy? Maurice, Robertson emphasises, although presented and made explicable to the reader in Robertson's luminous narrative of motives, was to his allies and antagonists a richly indeterminate character, and the variety of ways in which his character could be assessed and related weakened the resolutions of those with whom he interacted, and prevented them from being able to manipulate them:

> But, profoundly skilled as he was in the arts of deceit, and impenetrable as he thought the veil to be under which he concealed his designs, there were several things in his conduct which alarmed the emperor amidst his security, and tempted him frequently to suspect that he was meditating something extraordinary. As these suspicions took their rise from circumstances inconsiderable in themselves, or of an ambiguous as well as uncertain nature, they were more than counterbalanced by Maurice's address.[538]

Charles, himself a master of this projection of ambiguity, becomes in turn the dupe of his own craft.[539] Maurice's flexibility and apparent moderation made it difficult for his rivals to attach themselves to his ruling passions, and exploit and work upon them: the range, variety and depth of Maurice's motives serve as a cloak to prevent him from being fully penetrated.

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[538] HCV, IV, p. 59.

[539] As does Granvelle, one of the most prudent and sagacious men of the age, unable to believe that he could be outwitted by a German. See HCV, IV, pp. 61-62.

By contrast, Charles is no longer able to vary sufficiently his range of ruling passions, and is therefore led by them, and they operate as weaknesses in his closed system, points through which a subtle designer such as Maurice can access Charles' internal machinery and control it:

> ...he took hold of this predominating passion in order to amuse and deceive him...the Emperor's time was wholly engrossed, and his attention diverted, while he himself had leisure to mature his schemes, to carry on his intrigues, and to finish his preparations, before he threw off the mask and struck the blow which he had so long meditated.[540]

Maurice is also a morally ambiguous character, and here Robertson invokes the conventional distinction between a 'man' and a 'prince' which was also the rationale of his defence of Charles:

> If his exorbitant ambition, his profound dissimulation, and his unwarrantable usurpation of his kinsman's honours and dominions exclude him from being praised as virtuous man, his prudence in concerting his measures, his vigour in executing them, and the uniform success with which they were attended entitle him to the appellation of a great prince.

Maurice's sudden and abrupt death prevents his story from being anything other than an episode in the history of the Reformation, and the subsequent career of Maurice can only be

conjectured. However, his true importance within the narrative of *Charles V* concerns the way in which Charles is superseded by the force of events and the appropriation by others of his distinguishing characteristics. Maurice is a product of the new system of politics embodied by Charles, and also prefigures the way in which Charles' character will cease to be unique, will be perceived as general and meaningless: in his own lifetime, his character begins to lose its distinctiveness. In addition, Maurice dramatises what in other nations Robertson merely describes: the development of principles of unity and vigour in order to counter the threat posed by Charles' all-conquering ambition. In developing ambitions of their own, they reproduce Charles' character throughout Europe, and eventually emulate it.

The Character of the Mediator: the Papacy

Towards the end of the narrative, Robertson satirically contrasts the characters of Pope Paul IV and Charles, a reversal of characters which was one of those surprising transitions of the period that so appealed to Robertson:

> The contrast between Charles's conduct and that of the pope at this juncture was so obvious that it struck even the most careless observers; nor was the comparison which they made to the advantage of Paul. The former, a conqueror, born to reign, long accustomed to the splendour which accompanies supreme power, and to those busy and interesting scenes in which an active ambition had engaged him, quitted the world at a period of life not far advanced, that he might close the evening of his days in tranquillity and secure some interval for sober thought and serious recollection. The latter, a priest who had passed the early part of his life in the shade of the schools

[540] HCV, IV, pp. 43-45.

> and in the study of the speculative sciences, who was seemingly so detached from the world that he had shut himself up for many years in the solitude of a cloister, and who was not raised to the papal throne until he had reached the extremity of an old age, discovered at once all the impetuosity of youthful ambition and formed extensive schemes, in order to accomplish which he scrupled not to scatter the seeds of discord and to kindle the flames of war in every corner of Europe.[541]

Here, Robertson invites us to speculate on the mutability of character in the face of events, and the intervention of fortune. Yet there is an irony in this, since the papacy's involvement in the 'great game' of ambition, inappropriate as it is, is materially altered by the emergence of the new European power system. As Charles and his ambition is superseded on the stage of Europe, so Charles' intervention has ensured that the papacy's own system of ambition is cast aside. The alteration of Europe as a site of action, and the development of new forms of ambition, means that the idea of Europe as a single unified body, a myth that the papacy kept alive, is no longer viable. In the middle ages, the papacy was the only international political actor:

> Before the sixteenth century the popes were the movers and directors in every considerable enterprise; they were at the head of every great alliance; and, being considered as arbiters in the affairs of Christendom, the court of Rome was the centre of political negotiation and intrigue.[542]

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[541] HCV, IV, p. 235.
[542] HCV, IV, p. 325.

Europe was not however a community based on interaction, but on a common spiritual subservience to the dominion of Rome: the "empire of superstition".[543] The system of papal power was based upon a system of "adventurous and well-directed ambition": its history revealed one of "the boldest attempts ever made by human ambition". This ambition was so potent because it depended not on external force, but on exercising a "spiritual dominion over the minds and sentiments of men", colonising and feeding upon the internal principles and motives of the actors of Europe. Although destitute of genuine power, there "was not a state in Europe which had not been disquieted by their ambition".[544] Yet, as Robertson observed, the attempt by the papacy to translate the intangible threads of their spiritual authority into the tangible and real acquisition of temporal authority is the source of that instability of their character, which naturally tends to diminish the quality of the reverence felt for them.[545] With the growth of observation, and the subjection of the papacy to critical scrutiny, the popes are increasingly stripped of their imaginary and spiritual power. Indeed, the history of the papacy in the two centuries since the death of Charles had been a steady accommodation of its character to notions of propriety and decorum. This adjustment of character had resulted directly from the emergence of the Protestantism, and was a product of the emulation and intercourse between the competing faiths. This effect had even infiltrated the papal court, formerly a bastion of intrigue and corruption:

> Instead of rivalling the courts of temporal princes in gayety and surpassing them in licentiousness, the popes have studied to assume manners more severe and more suitable to their ecclesiastical character...Throughout this long succession of popes, a

[543] HCV, IV, p. 322.
[544] HCV, I, p. 149.

> wonderful decorum of conduct compared with that of the preceding ages, is observable.[546]

The chief point that Robertson wished to make, however, was that not only had the 'ecclesiastical' character become easier to sustain in the modern age, but that it had become imperative, and essential to their interests, for the papal clerics to assume and maintain it. Propriety had become a question of survival. The papacy retains its centrality in Robertson's narrative, because of its superiority in the arts of intrigue and negotiation, and the artful manipulation of its ideal rôle as the mediator of Europe.[547] Yet the real source of its authority, located in the minds of men, is eroded, and so they can only play a marginal role in European power politics, despite the skill of their adaptation to the politics of interest and character manipulation. This can best be seen in Robertson's characterisation of the Jesuits.[548]

The aim of the Jesuit order appears to be the complete control of character: thus, its internal operations aim at the complete subordination of individual characters to that of the order, and set up a complex and thorough system of inspection: it is therefore adept at "penetrating into the innermost recesses of the heart", and its regulations "descend into minute details with respect to the character of each person", in order to ascertain the use to which these 'passive

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[545] Ibid.: since their authority is entirely dependent upon "what they acquired by superior abilities, or superior sanctity".
[546] HCV, IV, pp. 327-329: this alteration in the "character of the popes" is one of most beneficial effects of the Reformation, Robertson claims.
[547] Robertson stresses continually the importance of this role of mediator in the new community of action.
[548] The Jesuits were a popular theme in the Enlightenment: see Jean le Rond d'Alembert, Sur la Destruction des Jesuites en France, par un Auteur désinteressé (Edinburgh, 1765), esp. pp. 1-49 on the

instruments' of their policy can be put. Each instrument therefore emerges from the rigorous Jesuit training with the strong imprint of the Jesuit character: "Such a singular form of policy could not fail to impress its character on all the members of the order".[549] This internal use of the knowledge of character has an external application: its aim is to "study the dispositions of the great" with the aim of acquiring an ascendant over them: to this end, despite their rigid adherence to the interest and ambitions of the order, the Jesuits cultivate also a 'pliable' attitude towards their manners and morals, and the flexible and versatile ability to accommodate themselves to the passions of men. Finally, the Jesuit seek to disguise their aims and methods, by keeping their rules concealed as an "impenetrable mystery". Robertson's admiration for the Jesuits, despite their sinister implications and the manifestly 'pernicious' tendency of their actions, was related to their absolute mastery of both internal and external languages of character, and this was, as it had been with Charles, the basis of their ability to act:

> They formed the minds of men in their youth. They retained an ascendant over them in their advanced years. They possessed, at different times, the direction of the most considerable courts in Europe. They mingled in all affairs. They took part in every intrigue and revolution. The general, by means of the extensive intelligence which he received, could regulate the operations of the order with the most perfect discernment, and by means of his absolute power, could carry them on with the utmost vigour and effect.[550]

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character of the Jesuits. Robertson was no exception: he deliberately created room in his narrative for a long digression on the characteristics of the order. HCV, III, pp. 191-209.

[549] HCV, III, pp. 191-194.

[550] HCV, III, pp. 197-198.

Yet the nature of papal ambition is inappropriate to the modern age, and cannot sustain itself in competition with the new monarchies, whose force and vigour outstrip it.[551]

Conclusion

There is an inherent irony in Robertson's view of the events of the age. The result of these titanic efforts is inconsiderable, and the balance and equality of power and abilities work to negate the events of the narrative:

> ...when nations are in a state similar to each other, and keep equal pace in their advances towards refinement, they are not exposed to the calamity of sudden conquests. Their acquisitions of knowledge, their progress in the art of war, their political sagacity and address, are nearly equal...After the fiercest and most lengthened contest, all the rival nations are exhausted, none are conquered.[552]

[551] It is interesting to note the extent to which Robertson depicts the Reformation in terms of character. Thus, the character discrepancy noticed by the peoples of Europe between the character of pope and prince, the diminution of reverence for the clerical and papal character, the difficulty of maintaining the sacred character. See especially HCV, II, pp. 134-145.
[552] HCV, IV, p. 303.

By the end of the narrative, the cycle of rivalries and jealousies initiated by Charles and Francis play themselves out only with the death of the principal personages, culminating not in Charles V's death in retirement and seclusion, but in the accidental and bathetic death of Henry II and the unlamented demise of Pope Paul, "at enmity with all the world". Robertson's irony is never more understated than in his dry conclusion of the narrative section of the history:

> Thus most of the personages, who had long sustained the principal characters on the great theatre of Europe disappeared, about the same time. A more known period of history opens at this era; other actors enter upon the stage, with different views as well as different passions; new contests arose, and new schemes of ambition occupied and disquieted mankind.[553]

There seem to be two implications that arise from this: firstly, that the 'theatre of Europe' was an ensemble piece, the product of the complex interactions of the 'principal characters'. It is their collective death, not that of Charles, that determines the end of the narrative. Charles is superseded: his withdrawal from the scenes of ambition and power does not halt their progress, the events continue without him, and Charles drops out of his own history.[554] Secondly, Robertson's use of a concluding theatrical motif appears to indicate the unreal nature of the narrative, the triviality of the events depicted, and perhaps the stylised nature of the descriptions and characterisations contained within it. The scene of ambition moves on,

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[553] HCV, IV, p. 302.

[554] See William Prescott's continuation, The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles the Fifth by William Robertson D.D. with An account of the Emperor's Life after his Abdication (London, 1887). Prescott was concerned to restore to Robertson's *History of Charles V* the biographical element that he felt was missing from Robertson's account, and to prevent Charles from disappearing from the history.

and Robertson's detailed reconstruction is revealed to be not a unique period of especially grand events, but an endlessly recurring pattern of interactions. Thus concludes the narrative. Yet Robertson chooses to end the history itself with a parallel to section III of the *View*: a view of the principal states of Europe which measures the degree of internal vigour which each acquired during the reign of Charles V. Here we see the product of the advances in "political sagacity and address" made by the statesmen of Europe during this age, a schooling provided almost entirely by Charles:

> A family so great and so aspiring [the Habsburgs], became the general object of jealousy and terror. All the power, as well as policy, of Europe were exerted during a century, in order to check and humble it...The nations of Europe had so often felt its superior power, and had been so constantly employed in guarding against it, that the dread of it became a kind of political habit, the influence of which remained when the causes, which had formed it, ceased to exist. [555]

Fear of Charles, and of the ambitions of his successors, created therefore the dominant pattern of European interaction for the modern era, and moulded Europe into a common entity:

> The nations of Europe in that age, as in the present, were like one great family; there were some features common to all, which fixed a resemblance; there were certain secularities conspicuous in each, which marked a distinction. But there was not among them that wide diversity of character and of genius which, in almost every

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Moreover, new materials "exhibit Charles' character and conduct in a very different light from that in which it has been usual to regard him", p. v.

> period of history, hath exalted the Europeans above the inhabitants of the other quarters of the globe, and seems to have destined the one to rule, and the other to obey.[556]

The situation of modern Europe is unique, a unity-in-diversity that owes much to those notions of 'syncretism' that Jeffrey Smitten has identified in Robertson's thought.[557] The narrative of *Charles V* traces the internal process of emulation and mutual observation by which this system was erected. This system, characterised by the equality and particularity of 'character and genius', is the only scene in which a mature narrative of fully interacting characters can be written, a narrative which revolves around the process of discerning character, motives and interest. *Charles V* shows this system emerging into coherence through the adventitious character of Charles himself, who as the cynosure of Europe becomes the focus and object of all political schemes and projections. As the first object of general European attention in the modern age, he is the occasion of the diffusion throughout Europe of the sagacity and force which so distinguished Charles' own character, by a process of defensive emulation. In the generation between Charles' assumption of power and his relinquishment of it, the statesmen of Europe have been schooled in the arts of address, while their states have been forced to acquire internal vigour.

Charles therefore remains a highly ambiguous figure, but he demonstrates the extent to which ambition is historically determined, both in its objects and its effects. As Robertson says, in any other historical situation, Charles' ambition would have resulted in a

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[555] HCV, IV, p. 310.
[556] HCV, IV, p. 304.

"torrent...subduing kingdoms in so short a space of time as was requisite to march through them", and Charles himself would have been exposed to the infamy of an Alexander, Genchizcan or Tamerlane.[558] However, as it stands Charles' character cannot be isolated from the context of which he is a part, and which Robertson supplies in the *View*. While the great figures of the past, such as Alexander or even the more praiseworthy character of Charlemain, appear to operate on an empty stage, exercising their virtues or exerting their force in a vacuum, Charles has the misfortune to jostle with a vast variety of characters in a crowded and increasingly competitive space, and to be overtaken by the emulate forces that he unleashes. As with Columbus, Charles is the ultimate victim of the process of which he is the progenitor. Yet he is the first representative of a new historiography that emerged from the events of his age, a history that could not have been written before his reign: a history of motives in which the competitors approach an effective equality in sagacity, refinement, discernment, understanding of their interests, and in the force by which their arts are backed, a history in which the correct reading of character and intention, and precise calculations based upon it, are essential. It is a history predicated upon never-ending universal conflict, but contained and ever varied by a plurality of participants and views. Such a history replaced the one-dimensional presentation of national history.

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[557] Jeffrey Smitten, 'The Shaping of Moderation: William Robertson and Arminianism', Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 22 (1992), pp. 281-300.

[558] HCV, IV, p. 303. See Gibbon's famous discussion of this question in the 'General Observations on the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West": HDF, II, pp. 511-516.

Chapter Six

The History of Enterprise and the Character of the Savage:

The History of America

Introduction: the Structure and the Nature of Events

The *History of Scotland* concerns the localisation of ambition, uncontrolled, disordered, and limited both by the weakness of the state and by its tendency to give way to or become part of other irregular passions, notably resentment. As a result, the narrative displays only destructive patterns of futile action, contained only because of the narrow confines of the field of action. The *History Of Charles V*, conversely, demonstrates both the freeing and the controlled direction of ambition, its closer relationship with a calculation of interest rather than passion, and its exercise in a larger sphere of action. Ultimately, the forces unleashed by the modern states of Europe are contained within a structure of competing and interacting ambitions, all of which combine to ensure a balance of forces and interests, that prevent the collapse of the system into either universal monarchy or splintered and separated fragments. The *History of America*, however, tells no single story of this kind, and this is reflected in its complex architecture. Rather, there are a number of stories and phases of action, all of which alternate with each other within the structure of *America*. Hence, Books I and II tell the story of the history of 'enterprise', firstly by tracing the development of navigation as a form of human action from its earliest expressions to its most refined modern forms, and then by embodying the new spirit of enterprise in the cohering figure of Columbus. Thus far the method and structure resemble those of *Charles V*, especially in the way in which Robertson interplays the conjectural history of abstract forces and motivations with their narrative expression in the form of a character who is the product and representative of the progression of motives and actions. Both Charles and Columbus are offered up as patterns of a new form of action, at the centre of a spectatorial process of emulation. However, in *America*,

Columbus disappears from the history early on, and while the propulsive forces that he has set in train, especially the spiral of emulation, continue to power the process of colonisation, the precise pattern of action which Columbus embodies is set aside. Edmund Burke's insight that Columbus' was an "innocent triumph" is useful here: "He had not destroyed, but discovered nations".[559] The passage from discovery to conquest, which begins to assert itself even under Columbus' brief period of authority, comes to the fore in Book III, with the removal of any kind of restraint on the adventurers who have been sucked by their passions into the New World. The nature of events therefore begins to warp. Robertson shows himself to be particularly sensitive to the collapse of the narrative as a site of great and meaningful actions. If the *History of Charles V* sees the establishment of stable relations beneath a surface of conflict, with all the actors of Europe drawn into the controlling pattern, the *History of America* sees instead the repetitive and destructive patterns of earlier stages of history, the barbarism of conquest and the wasting evils of civil war, reassert themselves in a very different context which makes them potentially more fatal. With Cortes and the conquest of Mexico, events once more take on a new shape, towards a more interactive conflict between nations of greater force and capability of action. Cortes himself is characterised as a type of politician that the events of Europe are shaping, and in his prudence and control the narrative once again finds a centre and focus. This however does not last: Book VI sees the narrative descend into a primitive anarchy from which it is only rescued by external intervention and its own inherent exhaustion. The slippage of qualities which is presented, from Columbus' almost idealised vision and prescience, to the ruthless and cruel exertion of violence by Pizarro, turns the *History of America* into a mockery of the

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[559] Edmund Burke, An Account of the European Settlements in America [1757] (London, 1808), I, p. 42.

initial pattern. Most importantly, *America* cannot consistently depict in its narrative history as a process of interaction between equal participants: no balance can be effected between the powerful and warlike Spaniards, and the native Americans.

Robertson is thus forced to be pragmatic in his depiction of the events of the discovery of America: as David Womersley has pointed out, many of the assumptions of Robertson's historiography- the importance of balance, interconnection and the interlocking nature of cause and effect- are challenged and ultimately rendered unworkable in his account of America.[560] There seems therefore to be an inherent disjunction built into the *History of America*, despite Robertson's claim that it formed an unusually tight unity:

> This is not only the most splendid portion of the American story, but so much detached, as, by itself, to form a perfect whole, remarkable for the unity of the subject.[561]

The *History of America* is fundamentally concerned with a clash of cultures. Therefore, apart from the pressures on the narrative arising from the different phases of action, Robertson confronts the problem of how to encompass the very different cultures and societies encountered in the history. Robertson's solution, the interpolation of dissertations upon the 'condition and character' of the Americans, Mexicans and Peruvians, seemed to some critics, such as Mably, to sever the thread of the narrative, and consequently break up the unity of the work.[562] The inclusion of Books IV and VII, the celebrated expositions of American

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[560] David Womersley, 'The Historical Writings of William Robertson', Journal of the History of Ideas, 47 (1986), pp. 503-506: "The *History of America* stresses disjunction rather than connection".
[561] HA, I, p. vi.
[562] Gabriel Honoré Bonnot, Abbé de Mably, De la manière d'écrire l'histoire (Paris, 1784), pp. 225-233.

savagery and Aztec and Inca pre-civilisation, represented a significant extension of Robertson's historiography towards a theoretical framework, which altered the structure and dynamic of *America*. This structure combined narrative and treatise in roughly equal measure, and clearly required very great variations in style and approach. Equally, however, the grandeur and variety of materials which Robertson was required to synthesise threatened to make the work indigestible and incoherent. Certainly, it represented a departure from the relatively unilinear trajectory of *Charles V* in requiring not one theoretical framing device for the action which it represented, but four. Therefore, in addition to Book I, which provides the essential background for the accurate characterisation of Columbus, Robertson feels the necessity to provide many different levels of characterisation, outwith the narrative itself. Unlike *Charles V* , there is no sphere of common action and interaction within which all characters can be assessed, and in which their mutual assessments of each other can be represented and dramatised. In *America*, there is only mutual astonishment and misinterpretation. The active intervention of the historian therefore, becomes the only means of bringing these disparate elements into a single work, and illuminating them through his mechanisms of characterisation. The Americans do not exist as a counter-balance to Spanish ambition and enterprise, and with the movement from modern Europe to a pre-modern environment the Spanish either lose or fail to develop the ability to observe and discern the Americans, because what they encounter is incapable of being fitted into their framework of expectations. Instead of the multiplicity of contingent characters held together by a common post-feudal European identity, in the *History of America* there exists, after the disappearance of Columbus and Cortes, only two distinct characters, the Spanish and the American, completely sundered from each other in terms of both material and mental culture, and incapable of meaningful interaction.

This poses a problem for the writing of history. The narrative of the actions of the Spanish in America threatens for Robertson to collapse into a primitive epic of improbabilities and heroic action, governed by the fancy, on the one hand, and into a register of crimes and massacres, on the other. *The History of America* thus sees Robertson, to an extent, retreating from narrative. This is felt most abruptly at the end of Book VI, in which Robertson drastically truncates his account of the affairs of the Spanish in the New World in order to provide a generic 'character' of the Spanish in America, a move which restores meaning and interest to an otherwise increasingly tedious narrative.

The character *tableaux* of the Americans provide the key to the narrative action, but the fact that they need to be provided separately and at different points in the narrative is itself significant. Mably made the not unreasonable point that Book IV should come at the beginning of the work, in Sallustian fashion, so that it would prepare the reader for the events that followed. This would avoid the fault which Mably detects in the work, of retrospective characterisation that perplexes the narrative, and robs it of authority.[563] Yet Robertson's decision not to amalgamate his theoretical pieces into one synthesis recognises that each of his theoretical sections are radically distinct, and describe very different cultures and characters.

To have attempted to combine his history of navigation, his dissertation on the character of the Americans, and his essay on the Mexicans and Peruvians, into a single discursive introduction would also have robbed the early narrative of its exclusive focus on Columbus and the progress of discovery. The dynamism of the process of emulation and ambition

moves on rapidly from Book I to Book II, and thereby Robertson asserts its unity as a process. Robertson's placement of Book IV is likewise very careful: it is used to separate the depredations of Book III from the more interactive and meaningful narrative of Cortes. Book VII serves to close off the narrative of civil war from the more placid economic considerations of Book VIII, and so emphasises the disjunction between modern Spanish America, firmly established under the external authority of the Crown, and the turbulence of its past.

Thus, a distinction can be made between the theoretical nature of Book I, which is progressive and serves to set the stage for a narrative of actions, and the dissertations upon American societies, which are static and give birth to no new forms of action or concepts, and which are used as devices of narrative closure. Certainly the effect is very different from the *View,* which shows the open-ended progress and elaboration of character, while Books IV and VII merely describe fixed and unified characters.

Despite this emphasis upon disjunction, and Robertson's inability to allow the narrative to flow, most critics appreciated the essential unity of Robertson's work. With a few exceptions, Robertson's balancing act was accepted by critics as a masterwork of history, and a triumph of impartiality. Thus, Edmund Burke in the *Annual Register* for 1777 praised the way in which the different aspects of the work were blended into an artful unity, contained within a "comprehensive plan, and judicious arrangement":

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[563] Mably, Ibid.

> It required the ability of a great master, to arrange the different parts of this magnificent picture in their proper places, to bestow on each its due proportion of light, shade and colouring, and to oblige the smallest to contribute its exact share, and no more, to the great effect of the whole. The delineation of human nature in such a variety of new situations, and the nice discrimination of those shades that mingle perceptibly in so many different gradations of savage life, required no common combination of qualities.

Thus, Robertson "required a mind turned, and accustomed to philosophical disquisition, an acute, critical, and discriminating spirit, with a temper capable of the most patient investigation and research". In addition to the presiding spirits of philosophy and historical investigation, Robertson's pen was able to encompass the realms of poetry, fable, travel and the depiction of nature:

> The subject, indeed, demanded all the writer's abilities: but it afforded, at the same time, a full scope to his genius. It represents splendid, romantic, and poetical scenes. All the marvellous of ancient fable, excepting when it departs from nature and reason, is here realized or exceeded. The great events of history are blended with the adventure of travel, and all the surprize, novelty, and pleasure of discovery. Nature here appears in her grandest manner...We are brought acquainted with man in every state of his existence...We see the first rudiments of society, and behold nations in every stage of their progress, from infancy to adolescence.[564]

[564] Annual Register (1777), pp. 214-215.

As with the *View*, upon the appearance of the *History of America* much of the approbation for the history concentrated upon Books IV and VIII, the former the most ambitious, and the latter the most potentially useful, portions of the work.[565] Nonetheless, it is important to note that few critics, with the exception of Mably, detected any incompatibility in the various functions that Robertson's historical *personae* performed in the history. Indeed, they believed that Robertson had succeeded in extending the purview of the historian, and in forging a new and creative union of historian and philosopher from multifarious elements, without sacrificing his identity as a historian to the claims of philosophical system. As the *Critical Review* wrote, Robertson had sedulously and skilfully avoided the 'rage of theory' and 'passion for system' which were the 'disease of modern philosophy', and thus of modern history also. It was through the components of his character as a historian rather than philosopher, in particular his accurate and industrious attention to particulars, that Robertson would inoculate the study of the New World from the errors of the past:

> Religious and political prejudices blinded the historians of the past age. Extravagant theory has, in some measure, perverted those of the present; at last history ceases to be a fable, truth begins to appear, & we rejoice at every effort to establish or continue her reign...If certainty is anywhere to be sought after, it is in historical researches.[566]

The identity of Robertson with an ideal of impartiality could be used to argue the superiority of his characterisation of the American over those of *philosophes*. Thus, Juan Nuix, although

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[565] See for instance the Monthly Review, which said of Book IV: "future times will probably refer to it as that part of his works which gives the best idea of his genius, and is the most finished of all his productions": 57 (1777), p. 47.
[566] Critical Review, 43 (1777), pp. 401-416.

intent on the defence of the Spanish in America against the claims of all 'philosophers', was anxious to spare Robertson the full effects of the vitriol that he poured on Raynal:

> Por lo que mira al Senor Robertson, protesto, que no quiero confundirle con los filosofos libertinos, ni aun con los enemigos de la Espana. Pero he juzgado necesario manifestar las equivocaciones que se encuentran en un libro util como el suyo: y que contradecir de esta manera una bella obra es respertale. Donde este Escoces sigue a los historiadores Espanoles, es uno de los Historiades mas excelentes de nuestro siglo; pero donde los abandona por querer ser filosofo, casi dexa de ser historiador.[567]

The *Critical Review* appreciated Robertson's achievement in terms of the specifically historical nature of his contribution to a debate conducted largely by 'philosophers', political writers, and fabulists:

> Views and sketches of the New World have been given by able writers, & splendid portions of the American story have been adorned with all the beauties of eloquence: But hitherto no author has bestowed the mature and profound investigation which

[567] "As to Robertson, I protest that I wish to class him neither as a libertine philosopher, nor as an enemy of Spain. Nevertheless I believe that it is necessary to bring to light the mistakes that are to be met with in such a useful book, and to contradict a fine work in this way is to show it great respect. Where the Scottish author follows the Spanish historians, he is one of the greatest historians of our age, but where he abandons this path for that of the philosopher, he is no longer worthy of the name historian". Juan Nuix, Reflexiones Imparciales sobre la humanidad de los Españoles en las Indias, contra los pretendidos filosofos y politicos (trans. from Italian by Pedro Varela y Ulloa; Madrid, 1782), Prologo del Autor, pp. xxxix-xl. Robertson's moderation was also recognised by Clavigero, the Mexican antiquary, who admitted that Robertson was "mas moderado que Raynal en la desconfianza de la historia, y mas proveido de libros y manuscritos espanoles": Francisco Javier Clavigero, Historia Antigua de México (Mexico City, 1945), I, p. 48.

such a subject required, or has finished, upon a regular plan, that complete narration & perfect whole which it is the province of the historian to transmit to posterity.[568]

Through a combination of the virtues of investigation with narration, and the unity which this combination produced, it was perceived that Robertson offered a unique perspective on the events of the New World.[569] Nonetheless there were those, such as Bryan Edwards, who saw a fundamental inconsistency in Robertson's narrative depiction of the Americans, and his philosophical synthesis of their character, underlining the very difficulty of attempting to view the same object under very different lights.[570] Narrative and theory were distinct operations, but Robertson's determination to include the character of the American threatened to undermine the authority of his narrative.

The History of Enterprise

Book I of *America* extended and elaborated the traditional humanist prefaces to the histories of Columbus, and thus like the *View of the Progress of Society in Europe* provided an enlarged contextual framework for Columbus' character. This can be seen by comparing Robertson's introduction with the perfunctory introductions of previous historians of

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[568] Critical Review, Ibid.

[569] The perception of Robertson's history as possessing peculiarly historical merits was sharpened by a comparison of the *History of America* with the *Histoire des Deux Indes* of Raynal and Diderot. See Girolamo Imbruglia, 'Les Premières lectures italiennes de *l'Histoire philosophique et politique des deux Indes*: entre Raynal et Robertson', Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 286 (1991), pp. 235-251 on the perceived superiority of Robertson *as a historian* over Raynal the propagandist. Thus, Giovanni Gatti had written that "Raynal mérite la gloire de maitre d'éloquence, voire, avec son ton de declamation, la titre de *libero pensatore*; alors que Robertson mérite le titre de plus grand historien de siècle". Ibid., pp. 235-236. See also the attack upon Raynal by the German academic historian Christoph Wilhelm Dohm for his lack of critical rigour: he was a 'politicien philosophique...mais n'est pas une historien': Martin Fontus, 'L'Histoire de Raynal vue par les Allemands', Ibid., p. 164.

Columbus and the discovery of America. Herrera, for instance, began the first book of his first decade with Columbus himself, and the motives which prompted him to embark upon his career, with little reference to the background of the history of navigation.[571] A writer closer in time and place to Robertson's Enlightenment idiom, John Campbell, displayed a particular interest in the history of navigation and commerce as the compiler of the encyclopaedic *Navigantium atque Itinerantium Bibliotheca or a Complete Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1744-8), but nonetheless devoted less than seven octavo pages of his admittedly brief *Concise History of Spanish America* (1741) to the general history of navigation before Columbus. [572] Nowhere did Campbell produce a full essay on the progress of discovery akin to Robertson's 'general survey of the progress of discovery'. Book I was demanded by the scope of Robertson's work: he wished to provide a full account of the principles in the human mind which powered the drive towards the outward expansion of Europe, in order to trace the precise emulative process that had produced the character of Columbus and explained the nature of his actions and motivations. Robertson links this with a general history of motivation, which sees the motives of men as continually expanding in response to different circumstances. In this way, the relationship of the figure of Columbus with Book I is analogous to that of Charles V with the *View*, although the functions that they play in the subsequent narratives are different. Columbus is, unavoidably, the dominating character of the *History of America*, a genius who in his person synthesises the complex forces at play in the history, who initiates a new scene of action, and who in himself provides

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[570] Bryan Edwards, History of the West Indies; Political and Commercial Survey of the West Indies (London, 1819).

[571] Antonio Herrera de Tordesillas, The General History of the Vast Continent and Islands of America, Commonly call'd the West Indies (trans. Captain John Stevens, London, 1725), I, pp. 4-10. Of course, as an official royal historiographer to the Spanish king, Herrera could not be expected to evince any especial interest in the Portuguese contribution to the history of navigation.

the pattern and focus for a new type of action. However, as is the case with Charles, Robertson does not wish merely to write his history in terms of the emergence of an all-conquering and omnipotent hero.[573] Both Charles and Columbus are embedded within a complex historical process, without which the true genius of their characters could not be understood or appreciated. Book I supplies the means for contextualising Columbus, by positioning him in a history of the abstract notion of 'enterprise' much as Charles was viewed in the light of the 'progress of ambition':

> It was in this school that the discoverer of America was trained; and unless we trace the steps by which his instructors and guides advanced, it will be impossible to comprehend the circumstances which suggested the idea, or facilitated the execution of his great design.[574]

Columbus, like Charles, is the creature of a radically redefined ambition, with its new and vast objects, and its new principles of action in order to attain them. Thus, the history of America can be written as a special case of the history of ambition, parallel with and reinforcing the process in Europe described by Robertson in his previous history. [575]

Robertson presents the history of navigation as a conjectural history, cast in the language of the developing needs and wants of mankind, the progressive enlargement of their ideas and desires, and the awakening of their curiosity. Beginning, conventionally, with the savage

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[572] John Campbell, A Concise History of the Spanish America (London, 1741), pp. 1-7.
[573] It is significant that, unlike Gibbon, Robertson very rarely uses the term 'hero'.
[574] HA, I, p. 56.

state, Robertson conjectures, unsurprisingly, the feeble nature of mankind's early efforts at navigation, the complexity of the skills required for safe navigation overcoming the weak motives which actuated savage men to break out of their narrow bounds:

> The rude and imperfect state in which navigation is still found among all nations which are not considerably civilized, corresponds with this account of its progress, and demonstrates that, in early times, the art was not so far improved as to enable men to undertake distant voyages, or to attempt remote discoveries.[576]

From this unpromising start, he then seeks to uncover the chain of motivation that induced the career of navigation to begin. Navigation, absorbed by Robertson into a general history of commerce, is a product of a relatively late stage of the progress of man, coming in a natural sequence after the notions of property and contract have been fully established. Once property and exchange have been regularised, the expansion of man's desires that results, in conjunction with what Robertson calls the "ingenuity of his nature", should prompt man naturally to the formation of a commercial intercourse, which in a 'spiral of needs' would power the urge to move further afield in order to satisfy those needs. Extensive navigation is, because of the nature of the earth, absolutely vital to the sustainment of a diverse commerce. With commerce there comes a diversification of motives, which lends strength to the process and reinforces its development. The creation of new motives engenders in its turn new types of action:

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[575] That there are significant differences however in the pattern of actions between the two histories is to be expected, given that Robertson found that he could not incorporate his insights into the history of American colonisation within the scope of the *History of the Reign of Charles V:* HCV, I, p. xiv

> The ambition of conquest, or the necessity of procuring new conquests, were no longer the sole motives of visiting distant lands. The desire of gain became a new incentive to activity, roused adventurers, and sent them forth upon long voyages, in search of countries, whose products or wants might increase that circulation, which nourishes and gives vigour to commerce.[577]

Thus compressed, the transition from the establishment of rough barter to elaborate and extensive trade seems to be natural and easy, fired as it by motives which appear to be compelling and built into human nature. It is Robertson's purpose to explain to the reader why this is not the case: why the progress of navigation has in reality been so retarded, and why its history is so discontinuous, consisting of the discovery and subsequent eclipse of navigation at certain periods:

> ...the progress of both [discovery and navigation] appears to have been wonderfully slow. It seems neither adequate to what we might have expected from the human mind, nor to what might have been performed by the power of the great empires which successively governed the world.[578]

Robertson locates this in the countervailing passion of fear: the same fear which is the basis of primitive religion and superstition is also that which circumscribes the activity of mankind, and locks its mind into a fabulous and delusional conception of the unknown. It is this principle that frustrates the natural progress of discovery, and which weaves itself into even the science and philosophy of the age through the theory of the 'torrid zone':

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[576] HA, I, p. 3
[577] HA, I, p. 5

> Thus this extravagant theory not only proves that the ancients were unacquainted with the true state of the globe, but it tended to render their ignorance perpetual, by representing all attempts towards opening a communication with the remote regions of the earth, as utterly impracticable.[579]

The story inherent in Book I is of the progressive liberation of the human mind from these self-imposed shackles, and the acquisition of the courage and the accurate perceptions and control of the imagination necessary to confront the unknown with equanimity. In addition, the natural progress of commerce is stifled by the force of national prejudices and character: the Egyptians and the Jews both encircle their conduct of commerce with restrictions that prevent it from breaking out of very narrow bounds, despite their high levels of civilisation.[580] Even amongst those nations where it takes hold, and its natural effects display themselves, commerce can be remarkably uncommunicative: thus, it is annexed to the secretive and impenetrable realm of policy, and becomes a 'secret of state'.[581]

Discovery as a form of action fails to develop in the ancient world, because the Greeks and Romans fail to 'comprehend' it: the direction that action takes, the objects towards which it is aimed, have to be widely understood before a widespread process of emulation can take place. Robertson is ironic concerning the early period of Greek history, as the 'heroic' age is depicted as an age of intellectual timidity: "During that period of disorder and ignorance, a

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[578] HA, I, p. 31.
[579] HA, I, pp. 32-34.
[580] HA, I, pp. 10-12.
[581] HA, I, p. 53. For instance, the progress of knowledge is stymied, in the case of the compass, by the 'commercial jealousy' of the Venetians.

thousand causes concurred in restraining curiosity and enterprise within very narrow bounds".[582] As a consequence of all of these factors, the history of the progress of navigation is one of painful tardiness, and has moreover to be stitched together from the fragments of an unobservant and uncomprehending age. The circumstances of the invention of the mariner's compass are shrouded in secrecy: "men relinquish ancient habits slowly, and with reluctance. They are averse to new experiments, and venture upon them with timidity". Nonetheless, commerce and navigation are elsewhere represented as uncontainable, possessing a natural propulsive force that ensures progress: "under every disadvantage, however, the active spirit of commerce exerted itself".[583] Commerce is posited as having enormous transformative powers. On its appearance it changes the face of everything, and constitutes "a new species of correspondence among men":

> Commerce was followed by its usual effects among both these people. It awakened curiosity, enlarged the ideas and desires of men, and incited them to bold enterprises. Voyages were undertaken, the sole object of which was to discover unknown countries, and to explore unknown seas.[584]

The shift from the 'ambition of conquest' to the 'desire of gain' seems to alter the nature of motivation, and therefore to channel activity in the direction of discovery and knowledge rather than simply subjugation of the Other.

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[582] HA, I, p. 18.
[583] See HA, I, p. 40 for the reawakening of commerce, which triggers the human mind.
[584] HA, I, pp. 12-13. On the transformative effect of commerce, see Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws (trans./ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller, Harold S. Stone; Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 354-356.

Yet the use of the descriptive term 'adventurers' to designate this new breed of actors implies that there may well be, in fact, little difference in appearance between the old and new forms of action. Conquest and trade, at a certain point in the evolution of commerce, spring from similar sources. Alexander is the perfect example of this early conflation of conqueror and trader. As we have seen, in the *View* Alexander represents the crimes and disorders as well as the vast but facile ambition of pre-modern history. Robertson himself conceded in the *View* that Alexander was the sort of character who should be expunged from the new history of the progress of the human mind. By contrast, in Book I, Alexander is seen as a germinal figure:

> That extraordinary man, notwithstanding the violent passions which incited him, at some times, to the wildest actions, and the most extravagant enterprises, possessed talents which fitted him not only to conquer, but to govern the world. He was capable of framing those bold and original schemes of policy, which gave a new form to human affairs. The revolution in commerce, brought about by the force of his genius, is hardly inferior to that revolution in empire, occasioned by the success of his arms.[585]

Robertson's devolvement of the great leap forward of Greek navigation and commerce upon the dubious figure of Alexander and his genius, foresight, sagacity and ambition, was controversial. As Hugh Bell wrote in opposition to Robertson's account of Alexander, philosophical history should concern itself only with characters who were *commercial*, that is, who embodied and represented the advance of those maxims and manners that resulted in the self-regulating peace and security of the commercial system. Robertson's attempt to

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[585] HA, I, p. 20.

impose upon Alexander this essential "commercial character" was entirely fictitious and bogus.[586] Yet Robertson's reconstruction of Alexander as a fit subject for philosophical history entailed two key assumptions: firstly, that commerce emerges from and is indissolubly connected with the turbulent passions and uncontrollable rapacity of adventurers; and secondly, that commerce is eventually absorbed into the instruments and arts of policy by sagacious and provident politicians. Robertson's endorsement of a 'great man' theory for the history of commerce was however only partial and limited: Alexander's enactments led nowhere, and his achievements were consequently 'discontinuous'.

If the first movement that Robertson describes in Book I is that from enervating fear to the acquisition of new motives that are powerful enough to break men out of the constraints of their own imaginations, whether it be conquest or the 'certain prospect of gain', the second is that of the reduction of navigation from a private activity conducted by restless adventurers actuated by an unrefined spirit of plunder, to an object of national interest and policy. This transition from irregular to regular action is superintended by the external force of Providence, but it is significant that in Robertson's scheme it is through the agency of the monarchy, and specifically the sagacious and insightful princes of Portugal, that Providence chooses to express itself:

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[586] Hugh Bell, Observations Upon the Character of Alexander the Great, as Given by the Learned and Reverend Dr Robertson, in his History of America and in his Historical Disquisition (Edinburgh, 1792), esp. pp. 5-20. "Dr Robertson bestows upon his hero a very fictitious virtue, when he holds him forth as a great commercial founder": p. 20.

> Providence decreed that men were to pass the limits within which they had been so long confined, and open to themselves a more ample field wherein to display their talents, their enterprise and their courage.[587]

Prior to their intervention, the spirit of discovery had been unregulated and lacked order or direction: voyages "seem not to have been undertaken in consequence of any public or regular plan for extending navigation and attempting new discoveries. They were either excursions suggested by that roving piratical spirit...or the commercial enterprises of private merchants, which attracted so little notice, that hardly any memorial of them is to be found in contemporary authors".[588] Religious fanaticism, greed, or mere restlessness all serve to bring men into the spiral of discovery, but Robertson implies that without being controlled and directed by a political order, the sphere of action would remain inherently limited. The endeavours of the Portuguese, overseen by a succession of able princes, results in a flowering of the human mind, the effects of which were sudden and deeply felt by all:

> Men long accustomed to circumscribe the activity and knowledge of the human mind within the limits to which they had been hitherto confined, were astonished to behold the sphere of navigation so suddenly enlarged...The learned and speculative reasoned and formed theories concerning those unexpected discoveries. The vulgar inquired and wondered; while enterprising adventurers crowded from every part of Europe.[589]

In describing this 'glory' of Portugal, Robertson may well have been thinking of Scotland, and drawing an unwritten parallel. Portugal's achievement is beyond the natural force of its

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[587] HA, I, p. 53.

monarchy, and although a product of that same acquisition of national force and "united vigour" that later became so general in Europe, it is also achieved by a channelling of the destructive forces of civil war and military turbulence into more coherent and ordered forms of action, that is, into *enterprise*. Naturally weak, with discovery its only viable "field of enterprise", by a shrewd discernment of the interests both of the crown and the nation, its princes were able to reorient the entire nature of European action and motivation in order to make Portugal not only considerable but the focus of all the eyes of Europe. Their discoveries "drew the attention of all the European nations, and held them in suspense and expectation". The revival of the Spectatorial language of interaction perfectly prepares the stage for Columbus, as Robertson ends Book I with an invocation of the reception of the news of the discovery of America in Europe: "and the eyes and admiration of mankind turned immediately toward that great object".[590] By this time, discovery has been assimilated into the process of political calculation that is being elaborated in Europe, as each state strives to work out the impact of each fresh discovery upon the European balance of power.

To a great extent, this extension, elevation and enlargement of the sphere of action is the work of Henry the Navigator, a man whose own "comprehensive genius" is far beyond the conception of his contemporaries, but who nonetheless succeeds in alerting his people, and all of Europe, to the existence of "prospects more extensive, and to suggest the idea of schemes more important, than those which had hitherto allured and occupied them" His discoveries, although small, "were sufficient to turn the curiosity of the European nations into a new channel, to excite an enterprising spirit". Henry anticipates Columbus in his

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[588] HA, I, p. 53.
[589] HA, I, p. 71.

ability to transform the base passions of private gain into a more enlightened and noble end, in his superiority of knowledge and loftiness of motivation, and above all in his omniscient control of the entire process. Henry, like Columbus, is above all an active figure, placed in contradistinction to "that cold timid prudence which rejects whatever has an air of novelty or enterprise". Moreover, he is a necessary instigator of the new scenes of action:

> In order to render these successful, it was necessary that they should be conducted by a person who possessed abilities capable of discerning what was attainable, who enjoyed leisure to form a regular system for prosecuting discovery, and who was animated with ardour that would persevere in spite of obstacles and repulses.[591]

Henry is not intimidated by appeals to prudence or interest, since he has moved beyond traditional concepts of either prudence or interest, and indeed is engaged in the process of redefining them. His percipience has detected the way in which discoveries can be made to serve the interests of the crown, and of the public. The least Robertsonian aspect of Henry is his freedom from ambition, his implausible devotion to "benevolence", and this is what marks him out from Columbus, whose transcendent qualities are sufficiently mixed with earthier passions. The necessity of Henry as the systematiser of discovery anticipates the instrumental control of the materials of discovery by Columbus in the ensuing narrative.

Columbus: Enterprise and Order

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[590] HA, I, pp. 82-83.

Book II is structured around the heroic and almost superhuman figure of Columbus, who emerges naturally yet also preternaturally from the vortex of emulation created by the Portuguese discoveries. In writing the history of Columbus, Robertson was dealing with the one of the genuine heroes of the modern world: his two principal sources, the biography written by Columbus' son Ferdinand, and Herrera's standard textbook account, both fed into a hagiographic tradition, presided over by Las Casas, that saw Columbus as a transcendentally Providential figure.[592] More modern histories scarcely deviated from this sacralisation of Columbus' character: Voltaire, for example, dramatically depicted Columbus' discovery of America as "a species of new creation", and for both Raynal and Edmund Burke Columbus was not only a character of sublime prudence, but the incarnation of the triumph of intellect in the modern era. [593] Robertson's overall portrayal of Columbus does not differ markedly from his sources: it is at once an investigation of prudence, an invocation of Providence, and a celebration of reflection as a spring of action. Anthony Pagden has detected in the Enlightenment a recharacterisation of Columbus, in which he is

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[591] HA, I, pp. 61-63.

[592] Although Herrera in much more moderate language than Ferdinand. Herrera, I, p. 6: "God several ways prompted Don Christopher Columbus to so great an enterprise"; p. 45: "It pleas'd God in his Mercy". Ferdinand's breathtaking comparison of Columbus to Christ is a remarkable extension of this principle: envisaging in Columbus the revelation of a secret typology, a mystical pattern deriving its imprint from God, and endowing every aspect of Columbus' life with a vast significance: see Ferdinand Columbus, The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus (trans. Benjamin Keen; New Jersey, 1959). It was Las Casas however who came closest to deifying Columbus. It is interesting that Robertson does not cite in this section the *Historia* of las Casas, which incorporated within itself imperfect versions of the Columbus journal, although Robertson possessed a copy in translation and had obviously read and used it.

[593] Voltaire, General History, II, p. 321: "This is without doubt the most important event that ever happened on our globe...All the great transactions of history appear as trifles, compared to this species of new creation". Raynal, II, p. 127: Columbus possessed 'true genius', combining "perseverance, spirit and courage" with prudence and address, all of which were superior to all the obstacles which ignorance, pride, covetousness and indolence could muster. See also the introduction to Joel Barlow's epic poem The Columbiad (Philadelphia, 1807), pp. 1-16, which treats Columbus in suitably rhapsodical style. Robertson's endeavours inspired the Spanish to emulate him: see Juan Bautista Muñoz Historia del Nuevo-Mundo (Madrid, 1793) and for an account of its Robertson-inspired genesis see J.L. Alborg, Historia de la Literatura Española: Siglo XVIII (Madrid, 1972), pp. 909-910.

shorn of those aspects of religious zeal, lust for personal glory and desire for gold which the historical Columbus exhibited: "In their place came a detached scientific personality", an embodiment of the disinterested pursuit of knowledge and curiosity.[594] Certainly, Robertson, unlike his nineteenth century successors William Prescott and Washington Irving, did not attach too much significance to Columbus' religious passions, mellowing them it into a bland "piety" and "respect for religion".[595] Yet, as we shall see, Pagden's paradigm is only partly true in Robertson's case: much of the interest in Columbus' character comes from the diversity and mixture of motives that he displayed, and his ability to hold them all in a unity.

Columbus is a product of a great ferment of activity that embraced all kinds of motives, and in pushing that process still further he was able to assimilate a variety of different springs of action to his own ends. This is the foundation of his enterprising prudence. Mably complained that Robertson had given insufficient space to the praise of Columbus' 'rare et grand' qualities, and that his treatment of Columbus was altogether too brief.[596] Instead, Robertson placed Columbus within the broad context of the history of discovery and colonisation, and made him the narrative representative of the modern forces of enterprise. He is for that reason a mixed and somewhat ambiguous character, despite his essentially

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[594] Anthony Pagden, European Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism (Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 99-100.

[595] HA, I, p. 250; William Hickling Prescott, History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella (London, 1838), II, p. 210: "This ebullition, which might well have passed for fanaticism in a later day, and given a visionary tinge to his whole project, was not quite so preposterous in an age in which the spirit of the Crusades might be said still to linger, and the romance of religion had not yet been dispelled by sober reason". Washington Irving, A History of the Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus (London, 1828), I, pp. 9-10: Irving was anxious to convert what Columbus had seen as 'supernatural' into the principle of imaginative genius. Modern historians have focused yet more attention upon the mystical and occult aspects, the pre-modern mentality, of Columbus: see Valerie I.J. Flint, The Imaginative Landscape of Christopher Columbus (Princeton University Press, 1992). A complex picture of Columbus's motivations, less straightforwardly religious than exotic and fantastical emerges from Felipe Fernández-Armesto, Columbus (Oxford University Press, 1992).

heroic nature. Nonetheless, it is clear that Columbus is altogether a nobler, loftier, more virtuous and benevolent character than Charles V. Their situations, while very different, seem to invite parallels. Both Charles and Columbus disclose to men a new sphere of action, Charles by his larger conception of political interest, Columbus by his bold refusal to accept the limitations of knowledge. Both prove to be skilled and pragmatic systematisers of motives and interests, and are held up as patterns of both purposive action and prudence. However, there is an irony in the fact that while Columbus' actions are more heroic and more praiseworthy, the sequence of actions that Columbus initiates collapses into disorder and chaos even before the end of the first phase of narrative in Books II and III. This is the calamity of Columbus' history, that although he is a pattern of genuine heroism, he can produce no continuous narrative heritage. His history is isolated and cut off from the subsequent developments of the narrative. This, as we have seen, is the opposite of the position of Charles V: the new types of action that he embodied are not only stable and balanced, but form the basis of the entire narrative of *The History of Charles V*, and indeed of mature historical narrative itself. None of this is Columbus' fault: it is inherent in the process of emulation that produced him, and in the nature of America as a site of action. The conditions for balance do not exist in America: this is attributable directly to the character of the American as a savage, and to the decline of the Spanish adventurers into a species of primitive conqueror. Indeed, Columbus' character, and that of Henry the Navigator, in their almost unattainable possession of virtue, benevolence, and vision, set up the prospect of a declension of character in the narrative, a slippage in the qualities of the actors from disinterested to corrupted forms of motivation, which is played out in the subsequent stories of Cortes, Pizarro and Almagro.

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[596] Mably, Ibid.

Contrary to Pagden's interpretation of Robertson's Columbus, he was not a character motivated solely by the pure principles of knowledge or beneficence, or by the promptings of his own profound reflection. Robertson admits into Columbus' makeup precisely those elements of personal glory and restless ambition that were considered so ambiguous by the Enlightenment. Robertson initially connects Columbus with the unstable and potentially combustible human raw material driving the process of discovery: "To every adventurer, animated either with curiosity to visit new countries, or with ambition to distinguish himself, the Portuguese service was extremely inviting".[597] The term 'adventurer' takes on an increasing importance as the history progresses, and this association of Columbus with the category of adventurism is significant. As a result, Columbus is implicated in the same desire for fame, glory and admiration that inspires the hopes of all the discoverers of the age. Thus, in addition to his transcendent curiosity, there is the inescapable fact of his raw ambition. Ambition is a part of his natural temper, unquenchable and restless, urging him on to greater efforts. The nature and object of his ambition however is historically determined: it is formed by the general movement of the human mind in the direction of discovery, and the widespread awakening of human endeavour that this creates:

> The successful progress of the Portuguese navigators had awakened a spirit of curiosity and emulation, which set every man of science upon examining all the circumstances that led to the discoveries which they had made, or that afforded a prospect of succeeding in any new and bolder undertaking.[598]

[597] HA, I, p. 88

Columbus' ambition is not entirely pure: it is linked to his desire for admiration and fame, and is described by Robertson as a passionate and compelling force:

> The study of these soothed and inflamed his favourite passion...he was now become one of the most skilful navigators in Europe. But, not content with that praise, his ambition aimed at something more.[599]

His early career in the Mediterranean leaves him dissatisfied, being a "sphere too narrow for his active mind". Even in gratifying his ambition, he increases its passionate intensity. There is however something superior in the breadth and extent of Columbus' ambition, something almost impossible to fulfil, that far outstrips that of the other adventurers who are caught up in the whirlwind of enterprise. This is manifested in a larger vision, a greater conception of what is possible, and combined with a boldness of execution and a flexibilty of manoeuvre it enables Columbus to solder together those habitually severed areas of human endeavour, the active and the speculative:

> To a mind less capable of forming and of executing great designs than that of Columbus, all those reasonings, and observations, and authorities, would have served only as the foundation of some fruitless and plausible theory...But with his sanguine and enterprising temper, speculation led directly to action.[600]

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[598] HA, I, p. 89.
[599] HA, I, pp. 88-89.
[600] HA, I, p. 96.

Robertson shows Columbus alternating three roles: the inventive and fertile 'projector' of schemes of action; the resourceful and active adventurer who performs them; and the prudent and careful commander who controls and orders the enterprise. As Robertson emphasises, this represents a rare conjunction of seemingly opposed and incompatible qualities:

> Happily for himself, and for the country by whom he was employed, he joined to the ardent temper and inventive genius of a projector, virtues of another species, which are rarely united with them. He possessed a thorough knowledge of mankind, a patient perseverance in executing any plan, the perfect government of his own passions, and the talent of acquiring an ascendant over those of other men. All these qualities, which formed him for command, were accompanied with that superior knowledge of his profession... [601]

Columbus' capacity for syncretism is remarkable: "in whose character the modesty and diffidence of true genius was united with the ardent enthusiasm of a projector".[602] There is a fourth, less easily performed role for Columbus: that of "humble suitor" at the Spanish court, a role which it is increasingly difficult for him to sustain as his discoveries expand.[603] Robertson is aware of the mixture of passions, motivations and abilities needed to fire the spirit of discovery, enterprise, and improvement, and he figures Columbus as a character capable of harmonising all these different principles into a perfect and purposeful union.

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[601] HA, I, p. 120.
[602] HA, I, p. 95.
[603] HA, I, pp. 248-249. He is also described as an "importunate suitor", from Ferdinand's point of view.

Columbus combines within his own person the principles of enterprise and order, and encapsulates within himself all the contrasting traits and qualities necessary both to excite and restrain the forces of enterprise. It is through the agency of Columbus that the impure but energising motives for discovery, the vast dreams of power and wealth, and the fanatical obsession with gold, are hitched to the process of discovery and manipulated to his own ends. Columbus' exceptionality derives from his instrumental control over the forces that the unleashing of the human mind has created. Edmund Burke had perhaps provided a template for Robertson's characterisation of Columbus by showing how Columbus' pragmatism had forced him to employ baser materials and motives as instruments in attaining his higher end, and therefore by portraying him as a master of political prudence:

> Columbus pacified every thing with equal spirit and address, sometimes giving way to the storm, and temporizing when he doubted his strength; but when he was assured of it, always employing it with resolution and effect; turning every incident, even the most unfavourable, to his advantage; and watching every change of nature, and every motion of the human mind, to employ them in his purposes...It is the principal thing which forms the character of a great man, to be rich in expedients.

Building upon Herrera's reptitious characterisation of Columbus as a 'discreet' captain (in Stevens' translation), Burke turned him from a Providential hero to a master political manipulator, and employed the language of political trickery, dissimulation and deception to describe him:

> There is no people who have not some points of ignorance, weakness or prejudice, which a penetrating mind may discover, and use as the most powerful instruments in the execution of his designs...he who understands the passions of men, and can entirely command his own, has the principal means of subduing them in his hands.[604]

Robertson adopted this Burkean spin on Columbus' character, and incorporated it into his conjectural history of enterprise. In episodes such as the description of how Columbus calmed and soothed the mutionous sailors on the first voyage to America, Robertson invokes the image of Columbus as a theatrical manipulator of appearances, using every means within his grasp to gain a purchase upon the minds of his turbulent followers:

> Columbus was fully sensible of his perilous situation. He had observed, with great uneasiness, the fatal operation of ignorance and of fear in producing disaffection among his crew, and saw that it was now ready to burst out into open mutiny. He retained, however, perfect presence of mind. He affected to seem ignorant of their machinations. Notwithstanding the agitation and solicitude of his own mind, he appeared with a cheerful countenance, like a man satisfied with the progress which he had made, and confident of success. Sometimes he employed all the arts of insinuation to soothe his men. Sometimes he endeavoured to work upon their ambition or avarice, by magnificent descriptions of the fame and wealth which they were about to acquire. On other occasions, he assumed a tone of authority, and threatened them with vengeance from their sovereign...[605]

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[604] Burke, Account, pp. 88-89.
[605] HA, I, p. 126.

This scene brilliantly captures Columbus' dilemma, his incisive observation of the nature of his situation, and details with admirable brevity the various expedients which he resorted to in order to shore up his fading authority. Such a compression of Columbus' actions appears to show him as a weak and indecisive leader, unable to settle into a consistent role, skipping uneasily from subtle politician, to weaver of dreams and visions, to imperious representative of the forces of authority. Yet the unity of these shifting responses is held together by the ascendancy which Columbus' character exerts over his crew, and is guaranteed by his shrewd insight into their motives and fickle and unstable natures. Such theatrical tricks, perfectly revealing the vulnerability of Columbus' position and sustained only by the 'reverence' which the crew, in their profound ignorance, feel for him, eventually force Columbus to conciliate not only the fears of his followers, but their passionate desires:

> Columbus comforted them with assurances of success, and the prospect of vast wealth...This early discovery of the spirit of his followers taught Columbus, that he must prepare to struggle, not only with the unavoidable difficulties which might be expected from the nature of his undertaking, but with such as were likely to arise from the ignorance and timidity of the people under his command; and he perceived that the art of governing the minds of men, would be no less requisite for accomplishing the discoveries which he had in view, than naval skill and undaunted courage.[606]

[606] HA, I, p. 120.

The weakness of Columbus' position, dependent as it is upon the influence of his personal qualities and his physical presence, requires him constantly to reaffirm and renew his authority, to prevent it from slipping into the indifference of familiarity, or indignation and contempt. The recurring pattern of Book II is that Columbus' absence leads to a collapse of prudence among his men, a "lack of restraint" that almost fatally compromises the colony:

> As soon as the powerful restraint which the presence and authority of Columbus imposed was withdrawn, the garrison threw off all regard for the officer whom he had invested with command. Regardless of the prudent instructions he had given them, every man became independent, and gratified his desires without control.[607]

The presence of Columbus appears to be indispensable to the stabilisation and normalisation of the project, but finally Columbus' end can only be achieved by fuelling the adventurers' inconsiderate lust for gold:

> It required all the authority and address of Columbus to re-establish subordination and tranquillity in the colony,. Threats and promises were alternately employed for this purpose; but nothing contributed more to sooth the malcontents than the prospect of finding...such a rich store of treasure as would be recompence for all their sufferings, and efface the memory of former disappointments.[608]

This is clearly a self-defeating task, since it merely increases the fever of expectation already excited amongst his followers, and which had been the foundation of their cruel

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[607] HA, I, pp. 166-167.
[608] HA, I, p. 174.

disappointments.[609] Thus, over the Spanish he must constantly renew their faith in his abilities, restrain their "rapacity and insolence", and yet also at the same time reactivate those motives which will drive them on to further discoveries. This dualism between control and action, although Columbus is capable of maintaining it in a harmonious balance within his own character, proves to be more fragile when he attempts to control it in others.

The effect of the New World on the minds of men is an 'intoxication', which makes Columbus' self-possession and 'presence of mind' all the more extraordinary and important, but all the more unrepeatable in the face of the continuing and rapid enlargement of hopes and expectations.[610] The result of this process amongst the colonists is a form of ambition not regularised by the systematic qualities of Columbus, but wild, extravagant and uncontrollable, and which despite its supposed grandeur expresses itself in banal if dangerous types of action: mutiny, rebellion, and, if granted the freedom, "licentious oppression". This kind of ambition is regressive, imprudent and disruptive but it is naturally prompted by the conditions of action in America, and more importantly by the impact that these conditions have upon the minds of the Spanish. A good example is Roldan, who possesses "an inconsiderate and turbulent ambition" which propels him into desperate measures "so unbecoming his rank". Thus, ambition causes Roldan to lose his sense of social propriety, and to fail to maintain his prescribed public role as a "guardian of order and tranquillity in the colony". The powerful nature of his ambition can be seen in the

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[609] HA, I, p. 173: "they exclaimed against Columbus and his companions in the former voyage, who, by their splendid but deceitful descriptions Hispaniola, had allured them to quit Spain for a barbarous uncultivated land".

[610] For examples of Robertson's usage of this figure as applied to the Spanish, see HA, I, p. 277; HA, III, pp. 107, 307, 316. A sudden influx of wealth intoxicates, leads to a taste for the 'wild', the 'extravagant' and the 'daring'.

devastating effects which it has upon the colony, especially in the way in which it can feed upon the lowest instincts of the colonists.

Roldan, in a manner reminiscent of Columbus, seeks to employ the colonists as tools in his scheme of self-aggrandisement, but his action is more closely aligned to the sudden and uncontrolled ambition of a feudal noble, than to the grand conception of Columbus. Because of Roldan's essential imprudence, his ambition spirals into mere 'extravagance', and while formidable can only ever be destructive. [611]

Roldan is the first of many such figures in the *History of America*, whose jealousy corrupts their ambition, and leads them into acts of ingratitude and disloyalty, and Columbus' response is typical. After the mutiny Columbus finds it necessary to yield to the desires of the malcontents, and suppresses his own natural resentment at Roldan's ingratitude in order to avoid the threat of a civil war "in which, whatever part prevailed, the power and strength must be so much wasted, as might encourage the common enemy to unite and complete the destruction". For Robertson this adherence to "public interest" at the expense of his own private passions is the essence of "prudent conduct":

> By promising to re-establish Roldan in his former office, he soothed his pride; and by complying with most of his demands in behalf of his followers, he satisfied their avarice. Thus, gradually and without bloodshed, but after many tedious negotiations, he dissolved this dangerous combination which threatened the colony with ruin; and restored the appearance of order, regular government, and tranquillity.[612]

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[611] HA, I, pp. 200-203.

This is an example of his skilful insight into the weaknesses and vagaries of human nature. Robertson does not set Columbus up in direct and hostile confrontation with the forces which threaten to retard or overwhelm his mission; rather, he negotiates, persuades, flatters, and seduces these forces to serve his own ends. These 'arts' form a part of the transcendental whole, however; they are essential to the fulfilment of his destiny, they are crucial to that element of his personality that makes it possible for him to act. His authority encompasses an awareness of the limitations of his ability to act freely; he knows when not to exercise his authority. It is the genius of Columbus to accommodate his scheme to the changeable passions of weaker men, without apparently compromising, sullying or losing sight of his aims.[613]

Columbus' eventual neglect and humiliation stems from a warping and corruption of the motives of enterprise, a process that might well be built into the machinery of emulation. The injustice of the glory accruing to the name of Vespucci is part of the way in which the founder of the New World is progressively marginalised. In part this is because while Columbus employs all of his time in attempting to improve his slender and faltering grip upon the colonies, and is trapped therefore in a narrow and counteractive series of actions, the progress of discovery that he inspired continues apace: it excites "a general emulation to surpass his performances".[614] Columbus is the presiding genius of this process, but gradually the initial admiration for the pioneer is lost, as men familiarise themselves with his

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[612] HA, I, pp. 203-204.
[613] This others such as Bovadilla cannot achieve: they merely allow license to proliferate.
[614] HA, I, p. 207.

discoveries, and as those discoveries lose the wonder which they once inspired, and become merely the scene of future calculation and speculation by others:

> Columbus not only introduced the spirit of enterprise into Spain, but all the first adventurers who distinguished themselves in this new career, were formed by his instructions, and acquired in his voyages the skill and information which qualified them to imitate his example.[615]

> The spirit of enterprise, though but newly awakened in Spain, began soon to operate extensively. All the attempts towards discovery made in that kingdom, had hitherto been carried on by Columbus alone...But now private adventurers, allured by the magnificent descriptions he gave of the regions which he had visited...[616]

As the Spanish court gives way to this 'privatisation' of discovery, the means of control are lost, and without the personal intervention of Columbus it becomes merely a scramble for private gain, detached from the higher ends to which Columbus had attempted to subordinate it. Of Nigno's voyage, Robertson wrote:

> This voyage seems to have been conducted with greater attention to private emolument, than to any general or national object. Nigno and Guerra made no discoveries of any importance; but they brough home such a return of gold and

[615] HA, I, pp. 214-215.
[616] HA, I, p. 211.

> pearls, as inflamed their countrymen with the desire of engaging in similar adventures.[617]

The spirit of discovery has succeeded, through the achievements of Columbus and the potentialities that they disclose, in freeing the human mind from the constraints of timidity, and it has become self-perpetuating. It no longer requires Columbus at its centre, as the animator of mankind. He has achieved the task of redirecting human action and motivation into a new channel:

> The spirit of discovery, feeble at first and cautious, moved within a very narrow sphere, and made its efforts with hesitation and timidity. Encouraged by success, it became adventurous, and boldly extended its operations. In the course of its progression, it continued to advance with a rapidity and force which burst through all the limits within which ignorance and fear had hitherto circumscribed the operations of the human race...In comparison with events so wonderful and unexpected, all that had hitherto been deemed great or splendid, faded away and disappeared. The human mind, roused and interested by the prospect, engaged with ardour in pursuit of them, and exerted its active powers in a new direction.[618]

Robertson contrasts the growing spirit of emulation with the distresses of Columbus himself, encircled by the passions of the colonists, and the ingratitude of the court.[619] Columbus, as

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[617] HA, I, p. 215.
[618] HA, I, pp. 210-211.
[619] HA, I, pp. 217-218.

Robertson makes clear, is only one man, and the extent and nature of his exertions waste him physically. Robertson emphasises his "unwearied endeavours", his necessity for vigilance, the intense application of his mind and body, and the impact of constant checks and disappointments upon a naturally vigorous and robust frame. Nonetheless, the decay of Columbus' body is set in contrast to his mental vigour and composure: his "firmness of mind...did not forsake him".[620] However, Columbus is finally revealed as only human. The darkest irony is that, after all his struggles to demonstrate the truth of his system, having vindicated his ideas by the boldness of his actions, Columbus, once the wonder at his achievements has subsided, is still treated as a deluded visionary, and his further projects treated with suspicion and cold caution:

> His salutary warning, which merited the greatest attention, was regarded as the dream of a visionary prophet, who arrogantly pretended to predict an event beyond the reach of human foresight.[621]

Columbus' own form of active and imaginative prudence is placed by Robertson in direct contrast to the "cold oeconomical prudence" of Ferdinand of Aragon, which is incapable of perceiving Columbus' vision. Columbus' greatest fear, that he would be seen merely as a "rash, deluded adventurer", is realised ironically after the truth of his system has been demonstrated to all. Within the space of a generation, mankind has again redrawn its mental boundaries with as much rigidity as before. The New World, with its increased opportunities

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[620] HA, I, p. 222.
[621] HA, I, p. 235.

for plunder and the satisfaction of human greed, has been effortlessly absorbed into the world-picture of the European adventurers. Discovery becomes easier, since the motives of gain and narrow self-interest are more easily grasped by more people, and the perceived benefits are seen to be more tangible; a Columbus, with his vision and imaginative capacity, is no longer necessary, and so the enterprise descends into a chaos of exploitation and degradation.

Robertson joins in the attempt of almost all except partisan Spanish historians, to exculpate Columbus from the disastrous implications of the conquest of America. Burke had shown Robertson how this could be done, by stressing the isolation of Columbus' character from all of the other actors in the drama: "The character of the first discoverer was extremely different from that of all with whom he dealt, and from that of most of those who pursued his dscoveries and conquests; some with a vigour and conduct equal, but all with virtues very much inferior".[622] By locating Columbus within the emulative process, Robertson was able to assert Columbus' causal connection with the progress of discovery, without fully implicating him in the ensuing chaos, since Columbus' control over the forces of emulation was naturally diminishing. The real reason for the declension of Spanish action lay in the nature of America as a site of action.

[622] Burke, p. 91. In addition, he combined within his own person "all the components of a great man": the qualities of a penetrating philosopher, and a great king, with the 'fortune' of a private man.

The Character of the Americans: Narrative and *Tableaux*

Book IV is the clearest expression of Robertson's identity as a theoretical historian, and of the conflation of 'philosophical' concerns with scholarly historical practice. Largely taking the form of a dissertation upon "the character and condition of the Americans", Book IV was an extraordinarily ambitious work, which like the *View* claimed by its scope and structural integrity an autonomy for itself from the narrative in which it was embedded.[623] Its subject-matter also carried it far beyond the confines of the narrative of Spanish America, and in it we can see the remnants of Robertson's original design of a combined history of all of the American colonies.[624] Quite what shape Book IV would have taken, and where it would have been placed in the overall design of such a scheme, can only be a matter of speculation. Robertson himself saw it as an inescapable part of his project, claiming it to be "one of the most important or instructive researches which can occupy the philosopher or historian".[625] Its philosophical content was appreciated by contemporaries. As Edmund Burke wrote to Robertson, "You have employ'd Philosophy to judge of manners; from manners you have drawn new resources for Philosophy", and of course it was Burke who famously placed Robertson's achievement within the context of "the great Map of Mankind".[626] Thus, Book

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[623] On Robertson's characterisation of the American see, Stewart J. Brown, 'An Eighteenth-Century Historian on the Amerindians: Culture, Colonialism, and Christianity in William Robertson's History of America', Studies in World Christianity 2 (1996), pp.204-222.

[624] Two portions of Robertson's history of British America, on New England and Virginia, were published on the advice of Hugh Blair in 1796 under the direction of Robertson's son: Blair to William Robertson junior, 21st January 1795, NLS MS ff. 163-164. See Jeffrey Smitten, 'Moderatism and History: William Robertson's Unfinished History of British America', in Sher, Richard, and Smitten, Jeffrey, (eds.), Scotland and America in the age of the enlightenment (Edinburgh University Press, 1990), pp.163-179. For the arduous process of publication of these fragments, see the letters between Robertson's son and the publisher Strahan: NLS MS 3944 ff. 167- 219.

[625] HA, II, p. 50.

[626] Burke to Robertson, 9th June 1777, NLS MS 3943, ff. 17-18; printed in Dugald Stewart, 'Account', MWC, pp. 153-155: "...there is no state or gradation of barbarism, and no mode of refinement which

IV transcended the limitations of Robertson's immediate subject matter, and plugged itself into a much larger history, a universal story of the progress of human manners and the human mind. David Armitage has argued that Robertson was compelled to provide a full-scale examination of the American savage as part of his general attempt to assess and understand the impact of the discovery of America upon human history. As such, Book IV provided a history of the human mind in two respects: of the mentality of the savage; and of the process of its absorption into modern philosophy and social thought.[627] Book IV was, as well as the fullest synthesis of the available evidence ever attempted, an intervention in one of the most vital philosophical debates of the eighteenth century, in which Robertson sought once again to create a special place for himself as a mediator of starkly conflicting opinions. Marshall and Williams have claimed that Robertson's work was "the main channel through which the ideas of Buffon and de Pauw reached the British literary public".[628] Thus, for a variety of reasons, Book IV seemed to break out of the straitjacket apparently imposed upon it by the narrative lines of *The History of America*, and connected Robertson with a language and method that combined the natural history of Buffon with the sociological imperatives of Montesquieu and the 4-stage theorists.

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we have not at the same time under our view: the very different civility of Europe and of China; the barbarism of Persia and of Abyssinia; the erratick manners of Tartary and of Arabia; the savage state of North America and of New Zealand". Robertson's contribution, so soon after the voyages of James Cook, was therefore timely.

[627] David Armitage, 'The New World and British Historical Thought: From Richard Hakluyt to William Robertson', in Karen Ordahl Kupperman, America in European Consciousness (University of North Carolina Press, 1995), pp. 52-75.

[628] P.J. Marshall., and Glyndwyr Williams, The Great Map of Mankind: British Perceptions of the World in the Age of Enlightenment (London, 1982), p. 219. Robertson's most obvious model for his construction of the American was Buffon, who had made the 'tableau' the crucial formula for the encapsulation of the qualities of a species or race. See Buffon, Oeuvres Philosophiques (ed. Jean Piveteau; Paris, 1954), which largely consists of a series of such character templates. See Michèle

As critics such as Bryan Edwards perceived, however, the conclusions of Book IV appeared to conflict with the representation of the Americans in the narrative. Edwards drew the conclusion from this that the methodology of Book IV, and Robertson's determination to bind up all of the nations of America into a single unified character, were inherently flawed. He demonstrated too great an attachment to the philosophical 'systems' of Buffon and de Pauw:

> Although our own learned historian is much too enlightened to adopt, in their fullest extent, these opinions...yet it is impossible to deny, that they have had some degree of influence in the general estimate which he has framed of the American character, for he ascribes to all the natives of the New World many of these imperfections on which the system in question is founded; and repeatedly asserts, that 'the qualities belonging to people of *all* the different tribes may be painted with the same features'. With this bias in his pen, it is not wonderful that this author is sometimes chargeable with repugnancy and contradiction.[629]

What Edwards found most unsustainable was Robertson's claim that the Americans were reducible to a uniformity: "he establishes it as a fixed principle", that all savages have "the same character". [630] For Edwards, this was both a denial of lived experience, and contrary to the principles of human nature. Indeed, Robertson's own narrative, according to Edwards, contradicted this absurd 'philosophical' position. Robertson, in common with the other

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Duchet, Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des lumières: Buffon, Voltaire, Helvètius, Diderot (Paris, 1971), esp. pp. 190-227.

[629] Bryan Edwards, History of the West Indies (London, 1819), I, p.xxix

[630] Nicholas Hudson assigns a pivotal role to Robertson in the development of scientific racism in the eighteenth century by reducing the native American from a plurality of nations to a single uniform type:

'philosophers', had laid it down as a fact that the Americans were both physically debilitated, and brutally insensible, possessed of a frigidity and "hardness of heart" at which the 'philosophers' affected to be shocked.[631] To refute this opinion, Edwards turned to Robertson's own narrative:

> ...Certainly the learned Author, while employed in this representation, had wholly forgotten the account which he had before given of the first interview between the Spaniards and the natives of Hispaniola...

in which he had fully displayed the sympathetic nature of the natives, the 'sincere condolence' of Guacanahari with Columbus, and had intimated the unfortunate consequences for the Americans of this excessively trusting 'sensibility': "Thus exceptions present themselves to every general conclusion until we are burthened with their variety:- And at last we end just where we began; for the wonderful uniformity which is said to have distinguished the American Indians, cannot be supported by analogy, because it is not founded in nature".[632] Edwards thus asserted the superiority of Robertson's narrative above

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'From "Nation" to "Race": The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought', Eighteenth-Century Studies, 29/3 (1996), pp. 247-262; pp. 250-251.

[631] See Cornelius de Pauw, Récherches philosophiques sur les Américains, ou Mémoires intéressants pour servir à l'Histoire de l'Espèce Humain (Berlin,1772). De Pauw was the most notorious, insistent and extreme of the *philosophes* to develop the theory of physical degeneration in the New World. D.A. Brading has called him the "Sepùlveda of the Enlightenment": The First America: the Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 431-432, pp. 436-438. See also Duchet, pp. 87-98, who locates de Pauw in a dense web of travel-writings and philosophical speculations. Antonello Gerbi, The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic (trans. Jeremy Moyle; University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), pp. 52-56. For a line-by-line refutation of de Pauw's thesis, see the anonymous Examen de Récherches Philosophiques sur l'Amérique et les Américains (Berlin, 1771).

[632] Edwards, p.xxxii: Edwards' subsequent narrative however is concerned very little with the native Americans, and much more with the public account of the transactions of the West Indies Company with the British Government. In this it followed a pattern which Knud Haakonssen has detected in James Mill's *History of British India*, of the radical separation of the two types of history according to

his Buffonian *tableau*, because it comprehended the essential variety of the Americans, and the wide range of their characteristics and responses.[633]

Yet as well as possessing a theoretical purpose, Book IV served a narrative function also. In the structure of the existing work, Book IV is placed at a convenient resting point in the narrative, at the end of the sequence of events initiated by the Columbian encounter with the natives, and at the beginning of a new and different series of events:

> But as the expedition upon which Velazquez was now intent, terminated in conquests of greater moment than what the Spaniards had hitherto achieved, and led them to the knowledge of a people, who, if compared with those tribes of America with whom they were hitherto acquainted, may be considered as highly civilised; it is proper to pause before we proceed to the history of events extremely different from those which we have already related, in order to take a view of the state of the New World when first discovered, and to contemplate the policy and manners of the rude

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the level of cultural development: the Indians were not permitted to come into the orbit of narrative, being exiled to the dissertations and appendices of static 'character' construction. It is interesting that, in the case of Edwards, it was a passionate advocate of native rights, unlike the hostile and dismissive Mill, who adopted this methodological distinction. Knud Haakonssen, 'James Mill as Conjectural Historian', Natural law and moral philosophy: From Grotius to the Scottish Enlightenment (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 295-304.

[633] T. Carlos Jacques has argued that stadial history was attracted to the *tableau* because it presented each stage as a unified and static whole, disconnected from all other stages. Thus, the accumulation of *tableaux* of individual peoples constituted a sort of 'king's cabinet' of knowledge spread out before the viewer. 'From Savages and Barbarians to Primitives: Africa, Social Typologies, and History in Eighteenth Century French Philosophy', History and Theory (April 1997), pp. 189- 215. Duchet has made a similar point about the relationship between the 'characters' of individual nations and the establishment of types: "Sans être radicalement nouvelle, leur description des moeurs et des usages des Africains fait authorité parce qu'elle présente un caractére synthetique et ordonne en un tableau commode des éléments d'information"; p. 96.

> uncultivated tribes that occupied all the parts of it with which the Spaniards were at this time acquainted.[634]

This justification for Book IV does not entirely answer Mably's charge that it is a retrospective, and therefore misplaced, introduction. However, Robertson does make it clear that the character of the natives is a significant factor in the definition of the nature of the action contained within the narrative, and therefore that the accurate characterisation of the Americans is crucial to the comprehension of the meaning and shape of the events. Book VII performs a similar task for, and occupies an analogous place in relation to, the phase of action associated with Cortes and Pizarro. The different nature of the events of Books V and VI from those of Book III is almost entirely owing to the differences that Robertson detects in the character of the natives with whom the Spanish (minimally) interact. Thus, quite apart from the centrality of the character of American society and culture to the theoretical history of mankind, it plays a vital part in the exposition of events. However, the inability of the narrative to reveal adequately the character of the Americans is itself an important theme in the history.

Robertson sets up in the initial encounter between the Spanish and the Americans a total contrast of characteristics that places each in a different conceptual world, with vastly different frames of reference:

> The former, enlightened and ambitious, formed already vast ideas with respect to the advantages which they might derive from those regions that began to open to their

[634] HA, I, p. 348.

> view. The latter, simple and undiscerning, had no foresight of the calamities and desolation which were approaching their country.[635]

The Spanish and the Americans are joined together in this event through their mutual amazement, but it is the disjunction that Robertson chooses to emphasise. Robertson compresses into this characterisation all of those qualities that prevent the Americans from participating in a narrative of actions with a European nation: they lack both discernment and foresight. Robertson, meanwhile, links the concept of 'enlightenment' to that of ambition, and both to that observation of the world that allows the Spanish to turn objects into instruments of their own interests. The Americans stand in total opposition to this. In the narrative of Books II and III, the Americans are the gentle, credulous, timid creatures of Las Casas' famous idealisation, people of an 'unsuspicious simplicity', an innocent and "simple race of men" whose eventual misfortune, and their incapacity to foresee it, are constantly foreshadowed by Robertson.[636] His tendency to portray them as the passive victims of Spanish brutality, as a "wretched race of people", prevents a genuine narrative of actions from emerging. With such feeble opponents, the events of Book III, stripped of the protective and cohering figure of Columbus, threaten to become not only repetitive but disgusting. There is no meaningful interaction possible between the Americans and the savage, and in the absence of such suitable materials for historical narrative, Robertson disclaims his office as a historian:

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[635] HA, I, pp. 133-134.

[636] Bartolomé de Las Casas, A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies (trans. and ed. Nigel Griffin, Harmondsworth, 1992). On Las Casas, see the 'Introduction' to the above by Anthony Pagden, pp. xiii-xli and an interesting discussion by Tzvetan Todorov, The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other (trans. Richard Howard; New York, 1984), pp. 145-170.

> When war is carried on between nations whose state of improvement is in any degree similar, the means of defence bear some proportion to those employed in the attack; and in this equal contest such efforts must be made, such talents are displayed, and such passions roused, as exhibit mankind to view in a situation no less striking than interesting. It is one of the noblest functions of history, to observe and to delineate men at a juncture when their minds are most violently agitated, and all their powers and passions are called forth. Hence the operations of war , and the struggles between contending states, have been deemed by historians, ancient as well as modern, a capital and important article in the annals of human actions. But in a contest between naked savages and one of the most warlike of European nations, where science, courage and discipline on one side, were opposed by ignorance, timidity and disorder on the other, a particular detail of events would be as unpleasant as uninstructive. [637]

The pattern repeats itself even in Book V, after the alteration in the nature of events to create a more interactive and conventional narrative, and Robertson once again registers the futility of representing in full narrative form these conflicts. This provides him with a powerful critique of his Spanish sources:

> The Spanish historians describe those successive battles with great pomp, and enter into a minute detail of particulars, mingling many exaggerated and incredible circumstances, with such as are real and marvellous. But no power of words can render the recital of a combat interesting, where there is no equality of danger; and when a narrative closes with an account of thousands slain on one side, while not a single person falls on the other, the most laboured descriptions of the previous

[637] HA, I, pp. 253-255.

> disposition of the troops, or of the various vicissitudes in the engagement, command no attention.[638]

Robertson entered territory which in itself was antipathetic to the morality of philosophic history. This is because it was in part a history of conquest and destruction, a reversion to an earlier mode of historiography, but even more devastating in its unrestricted effects and unbounded possibilities: the cruelties and excesses are also unbounded.[639] This creates a problem for Robertson in maintaining the interest of the history. The disgust at the minute and tedious relations of military engagements between savages and disciplined Europeans is characteristic of Robertson's philosophical milieu. Yet a 'balanced' narrative between two American tribes is unlikely to command the attention of Robertson or his ideal readership, since it also would lack the qualities which distinguish modern action: not merely the agitation of minds, or the incitement of passions, but their control and direction. The savage Americans cannot be incorporated into the narrative of the conquest as either interlocutors or interactors: they are not equal participants in the theatre of actions. Yet they are in any case incapable of that action which would distinguish and enliven a narrative.

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[638] HA, II, pp. 278-279.

[639] It is notable that in Robertson's only work subsequent to the *History of America*, *An Historical Disquisition Concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India* (1791) he appended a 'character' of the Hindus with the express aim of avoiding such horrors being repeated in India: HDI, p. 334. As V.G. Kiernan has remarked, the nabobs may have refused entry to missionaries in India because they had heard of Las Casas: The Lords of Human Kind: European Attitudes towards the Outside World in the Imperial Age (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 39. If so, this would probably have been in the form of Robertson's account. On the humanitarian applications of Robertson's dissertation, see the verses composed by Samuel Martin and sent to Robertson: "To curb the lust of power, the lust of Gain/ Superior Force or Knowledge to restrain": 11th April 1792, NLS MS 3944, ff. 94-101; and the letter from Dr P. Russell, 1st August 1792, NLS MS 3944: ff. 113-114.

Book IV embodied Robertson's recognition that the narrative could not reveal the character of the savage American with the same clarity that it could disclose the character of a purposeful actor in the events of the history, such as Cortes. This is due both to the nature of the Americans, and to the nature of the Spanish sources of the early incursions into America. The Spanish adventurers, from whom alone information concerning the Americans in their earliest and purest form could be gathered, were incapable of the discernment and discrimination necessary to produce accurate depictions of the native tribes:

> The Spaniards, who first visited America, and who had opportunity of beholding its various tribes...were far from possessing the qualities requisite for observing the striking spectacle presented to their view...The conquerors of the New World were mostly illiterate adventurers, destitute of all the ideas which should have directed them in contemplating objects, so very different from those with which they were acquainted.
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> Eager to take possession of a country of such extent and opulence, and happy in finding it occupied by inhabitants so incapable to defend it, they hastily pronounced them to be a wretched order of men, formed merely for servitude; and were more employed in computing the profits of labour, than in inquiring into the operations of their minds, or the reasons of their customs and institutions. [640]

Thus, an attempt to reconstruct the 'condition and character' of the Americans would necessarily have to take the form of the sort of conjectural and synthetic exercise that

[640] HA, II, p. 54: Robertson implies that their capacity for action robs them of that for discernment and observation.

Robertson attempted, moving beyond the accounts of the actual peoples encountered in the narrative. Robertson's narrative is forced, however, to replicate the images of the American found in the Spanish writers. Thus, on occasions, Robertson fits them into the Las Casas paradigm, and refers to them not as savages but as the 'inhabitants', the 'peoples', or the 'natives' of America. At other times, he sees them from the perspective of the Spaniards, whose sense of their strangeness and difference makes the Americans alternately an object of fear or derision. It is then that Robertson adopts the term 'savage', almost always to reflect the attitudes of the Spanish, either denoting in the American ferocity and violence (the threat posed by naked savages), or used as a mark of Spanish superiority (the ease of vanquishing 'naked savages').[641]

Robertson only occasionally individualises Americans in the narrative: before Montezuma, only Guacanahari and the cazique of Hatuey (capable of a "bravery far superior to that of his countrymen") make any impact upon the narrative, and they are clearly exceptional figures, seen to possess qualities far beyond those normally ascribed to their people.[642] However, almost as a deliberate policy, Robertson refuses to bring the Americans more clearly into focus in the narrative. They remain only dimly perceived, occasionally threatening, more often victimised figures, who flit in and out of the narrative. He deliberately eschews the method of Herrera and Raynal, of scattering characterisations of individual tribes and peoples throughout the narrative as and when the peoples are encountered. There are two possible reasons for this: firstly, in order to prevent the narrative from being encumbered,

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[641] See for example HA, I, p. 277.
[642] On Guacanahari, see HA, I, pp. 168-169. On Hatuey, HA, I, p. 279. On the representation of native Americans in the eighteenth century, see The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present (New York, 1978).

and the reader from being bored, with repetitious and essentially identical characterisations. After all, Robertson is confident in his assertion that the "qualities belonging to all the different tribes have such a near resemblance, that they may be painted with the same features".[643] Equally, Robertson may have felt that such contingent and localised characterisations of specific peoples could not be properly substantiated from the Spanish accounts, and would merely repeat their fables and misrepresentations. By separating the Americans into separate tribes, there was the possibility that they could be misrepresented as more diverse than they actually were, and loaded with qualities which they could not have possessed.

The tendency of the Spanish commentators and historians to incorporate the Americans into inappropriate narrative conventions was particularly strong, both because their imaginations could not encompass the extent of the cultural gulf between the Spanish and the Americans, and because of the temptation to exaggerate the glory of the conquest. This was particularly acute in the second phase of Spanish action, when the Mexicans and Peruvians had attained to a state more nearly resembling that of civilisation, and so the operation of the principle of resemblance upon the minds of the Spanish was especially strong and beguiling. The purpose of Book VII was to rein in those plausible appearances, and reassert the fundamental identity of the Mexicans as a type of advanced savage.

Robertson preferred however to leave the natives radically undefined in the narrative, to hold back his characterisation until he could gather together a more certain, because more theoretically grounded character of his own. In this, he mirrored in his structure the slow

[643] HA, II, p. 52.

progress whereby the Spanish eventually came to inquire into the character of the American, and render him an object of knowledge and debate. Yet by leaving the Americans formally undefined, Robertson left the explanation of the nature of events uncomprehended. There is nothing in the narrative, beyond bare references to the different states of improvement, to explain why the native Americans are incapable of acting to defend their patrimony. Book IV supplies this deficiency. It is the description of a type of being that is incapable of the purposive action that constitutes narrative. Indeed, as we shall see, it is primarily the capacity for action, rather than any other moral quality, that comes finally to distinguish the Americans from the Spanish, as the character of the Spanish seems to undergo a kind of regression to a form of active and resolute savagery.

The American and the Conditions for Action

Embedded in Book IV is a thesis concerning the incapacity of Americans for narrative action. By assimilating all of the Americans into the "general denomination of the savage", Robertson seeks to explain the absence of the Americans as a balancing factor in the narrative, and therefore hopes to understand the shape of the events that preceded Book IV. From the naked identification of the American with the philosophical-sociological concept of savagery, a number of narrative implications follow: the ease with which the Spanish subdue the natives, and the astonishing contempt which the Spaniards display for them, are explained; and the survival of the colonies after a self-destructive civil war can only be explained by reference to the fundamental nature of the natives.

Robertson's initial characterisation of the mind of the savage adopted the framework of the history of language from concrete to abstract expression used by Smith and Condillac, and applied directly to the structure of American languages by La Condamine.[644] Robertson follows them in believing that the savage is incapable of abstraction, because the objects within his view are too few. Those objects which cannot be put to use, which cannot immediately gratify an appetite, are viewed "without curiosity or attention":

> Satisfied with considering them in that simple mode, in which they appear to him, as separate and detached, he neither combines them so as to form general classes, nor contemplates their qualities apart from the subject in which they inhere, nor bestows a thought upon the operations of his own mind concerning them.[645]

Thus the savage lacks all abstract and reflective ideas, and his reasoning powers are confined to that which is sensible merely. This is reflected in the poverty of American languages, capable only of expressing what is 'material' or 'corporeal'. Savages lack both the inclination and capacity for 'useless speculation': when their minds are not directed towards a simple animal existence, they are "totally inactive", and their rational faculties are almost "dormant and unexercised".[646]

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[644] Robertson was in correspondence with La Condamine: see NLS MS 3942, f. 128. On La Condamine and American language, see Duchet, pp. 96-102; Brading, pp. 422-425. Brading has pointed out the impossibility that La Condamine found in reconciling his image of the Americans to the elevated view of their civilisation taken by Garcilas de la Vega. Anthony Pagden, The fall of natural man: The American Indian and the origins of comparative ethnology (Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 181.
[645] HA, II, p. 93. Cf. Condillac, 'Essai', Oeuvres Philosophiques, I, pp. 41-42.
[646] HA, II, p. 94.

Robertson moves on from the consideration of their intellectual powers to the examination of the process of motivation in the mind of the savage, and the correspondingly feeble and "languid" operation of his emotions. Unsurprisingly, he detects a paucity of motives in the savage. If the mind is confined to few objects, and is not activated by wants and desires, then it "cannot acquire any considerable degree of vigour or enlargement":

> From the same causes, the active efforts of the mind are few and, on most occasions, languid. If we examine into the motives which rouze men to activity in civilized life, and prompt them to persevere in fatiguing exertions of their ingenuity and strength, we shall find they chiefly arise from acquired wants and appetites. These are numerous and importunate; they keep the mind in perpetual agitation, and, in order to gratify it, invention must always be on the stretch, and industry must be incessantly employed.[647]

It is the absence of this mental ferment that prevents the savage from acting a significant part in the narrative:

> The thoughts and attention of a savage are confined within the small circle of objects immediately conducive to his preservation or enjoyment. Every thing beyond that, escapes his observation, or is perfectly indifferent to him. Like a mere child, what is before his eyes interests him; what is out of sight, makes little impression.[648]

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[647] HA, II, pp. 96-7.
[648] HA, II, p. 89.

Thus, the savage is improvident, incapable of thinking or planning ahead, and lacks the crucial capacity of 'foresight', without which mankind cannot fulfil his creative and inventive nature. There are two reasons cited for this lack of motivation: the satisfaction that the savage, without imagination, feels in climates where all the "desires of simple nature" are plentifully supplied.[649] Alternatively, in harsher and more barren conditions, the struggle for existence exhausts all the energies of the savage, and leaves him with no leisure to reflect or to develop the means by which to diversify his motives. The exigencies of the "chace" shape the savage into a life consisting of abrupt transitions from ardent but brief exertion to slothful negligence, an existence which merely sees him in two contrasting but nevertheless animalistic attitudes.[650] There is a crippling inconsistency inherent in the savage state, an 'inconsiderate levity', which sees the savage in an eternal see-saw between these two extreme positions: as Robertson claims, they who are capable in some situations of possessing a "force more than human" can at other times be transformed into fickle children. Under the influence of alcohol, gaming or dance, the savage is drawn out of his habitually phlegmatic temperament, only to become an over-expressive and uncontrolled creature.[651]

The most crippling factor in restricting the motives and actions of the American is the rudimentary nature of their social state. The "primaeval simplicity" of American society and its institutions enabled the historian to reduce the contemplation of American life to the study of the internal motions of the individual:

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[649] HA, II, p. 111. Cf. Hume, Treatise, pp. 494-495.
[650] HA, II, p. 99.

> Their political union is so incomplete, their civil institutions and regulations so few, so simple, and of such slender authority, that men in this state ought to be viewed rather as independent agents, than as members of a regular society. The character of the savage results almost entirely from his sentiments or feelings as an individual, and is but little influenced by his imperfect subjection to government and order. [652]

The American's insulation from his fellow men, his insensibility towards the other members of his tribe, and particularly his estrangement from his own family, are readily explained by reference to the state of society rather than to physical debility (although Robertson complicates his picture by invoking both), and can be traced to the same indifference towards the external world that makes him careless of all other objects if they cannot be subjected to immediate use, and gratify instant needs. This lack of interest, when applied to his social context, entails a necessary lack of those interactive and spectatorial skills that distinguish civilised man, and above all prevent the regular formation of combinations and co-operative ventures:

> He often takes resolutions alone, without feeling consulting or feeling any connexion with the persons around him...Conscious how little he depends upon other men, he is apt to view them with a careless indifference.[653]

Indeed, the absence of a concept of property amongst them, ensures that there is no hierarchy of ranks, and that all men are functionally identical. The only distinctions, and the only basis

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[651] HA, II, pp. 199-207. One of the points of consensus of Robertson's questionnaire, between both defenders and detractors of the savage character, was the ruinous addiction of Americans to 'spiritous liquors'. See 'Material Collected by Principal Robertson', NLS MS. 3954, ff. 20, 39, 48.

for authority, are derived from personal traits, and this in such a limited state of society means only a limited range of qualities, such as courage, or stealth.[654] As a consequence, they feel strongly the sentiments of independence: they are unaccustomed to restraint, either from external, social pressures, or from internal inhibitors.[655] Thus, such desires as they do have, they are entirely possessed by and subordinated to. If the American is supremely individualistic, he is an individual who possesses only generic characteristics: he is undifferentiated and unspecialised. Taciturn, but uncontemplative, inexpressive, and lacking the desire to communicate as well as the ability, the individual American is sundered from his fellows. The American thus stands in stark opposition to the European modern narrative man. Lacking a perfect social union, the societies of the Americans lack force or authority, and it is this which appears most conspicuously in the narrative. Despite the fact that in war the Americans achieve the closest union of which they are capable with each other, and exert themselves with a concentrated force of passion difficult for the European to sustain, Robertson emphasises that is in warfare that the superiority of the European over the American is most apparent:

> But though war be the chief occupation of men in their rude state, and to excel in it their highest distinction and pride, their inferiority is always manifest when they engage in competition with polished nations. Destitute of that foresight which discerns and provides for remote events, strangers to that union and mutual confidence requisite in forming any extensive plan of operation, and incapable of the subordination no less requisite in carrying such plans into execution in carrying such

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[652] HA, II, p. 59.
[653] HA, II, p. 213.
[654] HA, II, p. 131.

> plans into execution, savage nations may astonish a disciplined enemy by their valour, but seldom prove formidable to him by their conduct; and whenever the contest is of long continuance, must yield to superior art...When the people of Europe over-ran the various provinces of America, this superiority was still more conspicuous. Neither the courage nor the number of the natives could repel a handful of invaders. The alienation and enmity, prevalent among barbarians, prevented them from uniting in any common scheme of defence, and while each tribe fought separately, all were subdued.[656]

Emotionally, each individual is set apart from all others by their absence of strong and close connections with each other. American nations are sundered from each other by the vast extent of territories that they need to occupy, and by the powerful divides of enmity.

Overall, the picture given of the American in Robertson's account is highly negative, and it is easy to discern the lineaments of de Pauw's degeneracy thesis lurking behind Robertson's analytical obfuscation.[657] Robertson's use of language is often highly moralistic[658], and his

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[655] That is to say, they lack both the internal and external spectators.
[656] HA, II, pp. 167-168.
[657] As indeed Thomas Jefferson did: "As to the aboriginal man of America, I know of no respectable evidence on which the opinion of his inferiority of genius has been founded, but that of Don Ulloa. As to Robertson, he never was in America, he relates nothing on his own knowledge, he is a compiler merely of the relations of others, and a mere translator of the opinions of Monsieur de Buffon. I should as soon, therefore, add the translators of Robertson to the witnesses of this fact, as himself. Paw, the beginner of this charge, was a compiler from the works of others; and of the most unlucky description; for he seems to have read the writings of travellers, only to collect and republish their lies". Letter to Chastellux, June 7th 1785: Thomas Jefferson, Writings (ed. Merrill D. Peterson; New York, 1984), pp. 800-801. Jefferson himself was willing to see degeneration as entirely possible in South America, however.
[658] On the perpetuation of moralistic categories in Book IV, see E. Adamson Hoebel, 'William Robertson: An Eighteenth Century Anthropologist- Historian', in American Anthropologist 16 (1960), pp. 648-655; p. 652. R. H Pearce, The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Idea of Civilisation (Baltimore, 1953). Pierre Bertiaume has condemned Raynal's portrait of the American as more pedagogic than ethnographic: "Etrangement, Raynal parait etre incapable de penser le probleme

vignettes of savage life often startling and alienating, especially the frequent comparisons of the American with brute creation:

> Man, in some parts of America, appears in a form so rude, that we can discover no effects of his activity, and the principle of understanding which should direct it, seems hardly to be unfolded. Like the other animals, he has no fixed residence...[659]

As a piece of argumentation, it was an effective counterblast to the dreams of Rousseau. John Playfair wrote to Robertson's son contrasting the skill of Robertson in "delineating the character of the savage" with that of Raynal:

> Raynal's is drawn with bold strokes indeed, but as now appears with false colourings; the image in itself is ill-defined and incomplete, and conveys to us notions which tho' great are vague and indeterminate. Your father's pencil to all the energy and expression of the abbe's, adds the accuracy of real perspective, and that judicious selection of circumstances, which adds a relief to the whole. It is conducted with all the skill of the philosophic historian who is neither to be mislead by the misrepresentation of facts, nor seduced by the spirit of system.

Playfair admitted himself cured by Robertson of the 'excessive admiration' which he had previously entertained for the savage state, influenced by Rousseau.[660] Nonetheless,

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en termes d'histoire...Dans l'ouvrage de Raynal, malgre son titre, il n'y a pas d'histoire". Berthiaume, Pierre, 'Raynal: rhétorique sauvage, l'Amerindien dans l'*Historie des deux Indes*', Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth-Century 333 (1995), p. 234.

[659] HA, II, p. 98. cf. Buffon on the natives of South Australia: "ceux de tous les humains qui approchent le plus des brutes", quoted in Duchet, p. 204.

[660] John Playfair to William Robertson *secundus,* 10th July 1777, NLS MS 3943, ff. 26-27.

Robertson's reputation for lack of dogmatism was just and well-founded. The *Annual Register* praised the indeterminacy of Robertson's picture:

> But these theories, however ingenious and rational, are still mere theories, and are so stated. They are not laid down as dogmas.[661]

James Dunbar, although an opponent of the de Pauw thesis, acknowledged that "Dr Robertson's description of savage life, though not indulgent, is credible and consistent; & he allows the Indians to possess, in an eminent degree, the benevolent instincts of nature".[662] Robertson significantly modifies his initial unmitigated representation of the savage, confessing that this "description, however, applies only to some tribes". Robertson's extreme portrait of the savage is an unsustainable identity, and its shocking and disgusting impact is related to its fundamental opposition to the operation of the laws of nature:

> Man cannot continue long in this state of feeble and uniformed infancy. He was made for industry and action, and the powers of his nature, as well as the necessity of his condition, urge him to fulfil his destiny.

However, even after this career of regular industry has begun, "the improvident and slothful genius of the savage predominates".[663] Thus, Robertson claims the right to trace deviations from the standard account of savagery that he has given, but it nevertheless forms the

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[661] Annual Register (1777), pp.218-219.
[662] James Dunbar, An Essay on the History of Mankind (London, 1781), pp. 217-218. Dunbar was responding to Josiah Tucker's A Treatise Concerning Civil Government (London, 1781), which had also appealed to Robertson's authority as a historian in order to shore up a philosophical position.
[663] HA, II, pp. 98-99.

template against which to measure the actions of all American societies. Since they all fall under the "denomination of *Savage*", to a greater or lesser degree, then the improvements which Robertson points out, and the deviations which they exhibit, are nonetheless tethered. This circumscription of the qualities of the Americans is necessary, as we shall see, because of the instability and vagueness of the language of character once it is applied to them. Robertson freely admits that his picture of the savage mind applies only to the most simple tribes, and that most had moved beyond this basic state. However, in asserting the principal attributes of savage character before going on to discuss savage society in more detail, he has made sure that all attributes given to the American are confined within a circle. This prevents the easy application to the American of qualities that he could not possess, but which are inescapable in a narrative because of the generality of narrative descriptive terms.

Since Americans begin to acquire the motives that we recognise- ambition, avarice, interest, dissimulation, address, cunning- at a comparatively early stage in social development, the 'ideal' savage barely exists, except in the most remote areas; most of the tribes encountered on the mainland are more formidable. This is most apparent in the first part of Robertson's 'general estimate' of the character of the savage, in which he surveys the principal 'defects' or 'vices' that attach themselves to the American. Here, he qualifies the picture he had given of the narrow and constricted mind of the savage by depicting him as an independent agent, relying upon the efforts of his own experience and observation, and requiring a degree of sagacity and penetration in order to respond to the exigencies of his environment:

> He is frequently engaged in measures, where every step depends upon his own ability to decide, where he must rely solely upon his own penetration to discern the dangers to which he is exposed, and upon his own wisdom in providing against them.[664]

This depiction of the savage as an active, inventive and purposive agent, owes something to the kind of discourse associated with Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, usually rejected by Robertson but occasionally as in the *View* embraced by him, that sees the American as a primitive analogue of the classical citizen- warrior.[665] Yet Robertson goes further than this, and affects to see in the American traits which he had previously and quite conventionally applied to the *politiques* of the sixteenth century. That this is patently ridiculous reveals the hollowness of much of the language of characterisation in its confrontation with the behavioural patterns of the Americans. Thus, in attributing to the American a sort of 'cunning' equivalent to that of the lower orders in polished societies, Robertson fails to embed in the term an appreciation of the vast differences in social context, in the objects at which this cunning is aimed, and the instruments which it employs. The difference instead is shown to lie in the concentration of the principle, in its more powerful operation, and its closer identity with the entire character of the American: "Accordingly, art and cunning have been universally observed as distinguishing characteristics of all savages".[666] Robertson expands upon this in language that could be used to describe a more refined and politic state of society:

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[664] HA, II, p. 211.
[665] Adam Ferguson, Essay, pp. 103-107.
[666] HA, II, pp. 218-220.

> The people of the rude tribes of America are remarkable for their artifice and duplicity. Impenetrably secret in forming their measures, they pursue them with a patient undeviating attention, and there is no refinement of dissimulation which they cannot employ, in order to ensure success.[667]

Such Tacitean language, of secrecy and dissimulation, seems to jar with everything that Robertson has hitherto said concerning the nature of the savage, and holds out the possibility of their employment of complex forms of disguise, trickery and deceit: all qualities which seem to be far beyond the capacity of the generic American. The impenetrability of the American, hitherto related to his deep stupidity, is here seen to be a deliberate act of policy:

> The dissimulation and craft of individuals is no less remarkable than that of nations. When set upon deceiving, they wrap themselves up so artificially, that it is impossible to penetrate into their intentions, or to detect their designs.[668]

For the modern European politician, dissimulation is a strategy subordinated to his successful manipulation of a vast variety of objects, and linked to his imaginative projection of future possibilities. It is connected ultimately to that quality which the Americans so markedly lack, foresight, and it is the product of numerous calculations based on the intended effect of a series of actions and gestures upon an intended audience. Elsewhere, Robertson concedes that each tribe is extremely attentive to the operations of its neighbours, and "watch

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[667] HA, II, pp. 218-219.

[668] HA, II, p. 220. In addition, Robertson associates them with the language of system: "With them war is a system of craft, in which they...have their invention continually upon the stretch to circumvent and surprise their enemies"; HA, II, p. 219.

the motions of their enemies, and act against them with concert and vigour".[669] The irony of this description lies in its unconscious reference back to *Charles V*, to the European balance of power achieved only at the end of Charles' reign. In a political system that is held by Robertson barely to exist, Americans are seen to possess 'vigour' and a degree of unity that enables them to check instantly any hostile act of surrounding nations. The American's recourse to stratagem is due to their incapacity to deploy 'open force', in the same way as the Italian policy of craft and subtlety is the result of military weakness and lack of national unity.

Thus, in some ways the similarity of character descriptions deployed in Robertson's account serves to erase the difference between American and European, and to rehabilitate the American as a being possessing sagacity, penetration, activity, the possibility of invention and even the chief characteristic of modern civilised nations, "disingenuous subtlety".[670] Yet the fact that many of these qualities are listed as vices demonstrates that Robertson, in associating the American with notable European vices, is subtly manipulating the language of character description in order to explode the Rousseauvian ideal savage. The fact that, when the qualities are examined more closely, they are seen to be related to the state of society from which they spring, and are entirely explicable in terms of these circumstances, achieves for Robertson the double effect of making the savage seem familiar in the possession of familiar 'defects', while simultaneously distancing the American from the true grandeur and complexity of modern European power politics.

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[669] Cf HA, II, p. 153: "Such is the difficulty of accustoming savages to subordination, or to act in concert".

Despite the appearance of similarity that the descriptive terms suggest, Robertson nonetheless believes that these similarities are superficial: it is impossible for the political wisdom of the Americans to be deeply entrenched, or to embrace such a variety of objects as that of modern nations and politicians. Despite a shared name, there is no commensurability between the 'sagacity' of a savage, and that of Charles V. Characteristically, Robertson imputes the appearance of complexity and deliberation visible in the assemblies of the Americans not to any *real* sagacity, but to the impenetrable nature of the Americans:

> ...their negotiations are so many, and so long protracted, as to give their proceedings an extraordinary aspect of wisdom. But this is not owing so much to the depth of their schemes as to coldness and phlegm of their temper, which render them slow in determining.[671]

Yet Robertson had noted earlier that in war Americans were seen to display "no inconsiderable portion of political discernment or sagacity": a characteristic inconsistency.[672] Thus, the inconsistencies detected by Edwards between the narrative and Book IV have their foundation in the nature of the sources, which fail to capture the real character of the

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[670] HA, II, p. 219.
[671] HA, II, pp. 212-213.
[672] HA, II, p. 115. The Five Nations, whose transactions were so fully documented by Colden and Charlevoix, were conceived as exceptions to the general absence of sagacity of Americans. Roger Emerson has shown how Cadwallader Colden, by placing the Five Nations in a political context, where they are "sensible actors", they achieve an equivalence with the French, with whom they interact: 'American Indians, Frenchmen, and Scots Philosophers', Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 9 (1979), pp. 211-236. Adam Ferguson used Colden and Charlevoix as his principal sources, and this may explain Ferguson's picture of the savage as more active, warlike and sagacious than Robertson's portrait. See Adam Ferguson, Essay, pp. 81-96. Charlevoix, in *The History of New France* alternated, according to the specific tribe whose character he treated, between viewing the American as deficient in reason, or as possessing "more of man than ourselves". See especially his characterisation of the Hurons: The History and General Description of New France (trans, J.G. Shea; London, 1902).

Americans; and in the apparent diversity of American tribes themselves, which occasionally perplexes Robertson himself, and makes Book IV, despite the confident assertion of unity at the beginning, a much more cautious inquiry. Finally, they are due to the problem of the language used to make characterisations itself: the sagacity of an Iroquois sachem is in no way comparable, in effect, in range of objects, in force exerted, to that of a European monarch or general. Only through the close scrutiny of the stage of society can the nature of the action related in the narrative truly be understood. [673]

Beyond Savagery: the Mexicans and the Peruvians

Books V and VI present a more equal interaction than any that had been seen previously in the *History of America.* As Robertson wrote of the siege of Mexico:

> As the struggle here was more obstinate, it was likewise more equal, than any between the inhabitants of the Old and New Worlds.[674]

The victory of the Spanish over the Mexicans is ascribed more to political causes than to the mere exercise of brute force, or, as the Spanish historians would have it, the "romantic valour" of their countrymen. Yet, as Robertson claims, this adds more genuine merit to the success of the Spanish, and especially to the character of Cortes, "who, under every disadvanatage, acquired such an ascendant over unknown nations, as to render them

[673] Robertson finds it difficult to account for the "untimely servitude" of the Natchez and the Bogota, and the premature luxury and corruption of their societies. HA, II, pp. 137-141.
[674] HA, II, p. 387.

instruments towards carrying his schemes into execution".[675] This acquisition of ascendancy is of greater moment in this part of the narrative, since the 'empires' of Mexico and Peru are not only "polished" and refined, to an extent, but capable both of the exertion of force and the employment of arts and address. While the earlier incursions lack a certain grandeur, being the mere subjugation of naked savages, the events in Mexico and Peru are of a different order, and display the superiority of European political arts to a much greater extent than in the earlier books.

The crucial problem of representation upon which Books V and VI turn was at the centre of Book VII:

> From this enumeration of facts, it seems, upon the whole, to be evident, that the state of society in Mexico was considerably advanced beyond that of the savage tribes which we have delineated. But it is no less manifest, that with respect to many particulars, the Spanish accounts of their progress appear to be highly embellished.[676]

This, however, was not a normal case of historians embroidering their narratives in order to exaggerate the glory of their nation. Rather, it was the result of the disorienting impact of Mexico upon the mental processes of the Spanish, and their inability to perceive the genuine differences beneath the apparent resemblance of Mexico to old world paradigms:

> There is not a more frequent or amore fertile source of deception in describing the manners and arts of savage nations, or of such as are imperfectly civilized, than that

[675] HA, II, pp. 387-388.
[676] HA, III, pp. 193-194.

> of applying to them the names and phrases appropriated to the institutions and refinements of polished life.

For this reason, Robertson was keen to avoid the application of the term 'nation' to the 'petty associations' which existed in America at that time, although he was by no means consistent himself in his usage. The absence of a vocabulary to describe the rulers of an intermediate state such as Mexico, easily led the careless Spanish historians into calling Montezuma an 'emperor', his residence a 'palace', and his household a 'court':

> Under such appellations they acquire, in our estimation, an importance and dignity which does not belong to them. The illusion spreads, and giving a false colour to every part of the narrative, the imagination is so much carried away with the resemblance, that it becomes difficult to discern objects as they really are.[677]

It is too much to expect men as unimproved in sciences to be able to discriminate the fine differences between states of improvement. However, the danger lay in the lazy adoption by later historians of such terms of description. Thus, Robertson attacked particularly the seventeenth-century Spanish writer Antonio de Solis, and one of his least favourite historians, for the importation of such basic errors into what should have been a critical narrative:

> Later writers have adopted the style of the original historians, and improved upon it. The colours with which De Solis delineates the character and describes the actions of

[677] HA, III, p. 194.

> Montezuma, the splendour of his court, the laws and policy of his empire, are the same that he must have employed in exhibiting to view the monarch and institutions of a highly polished people.[678]

Book VII is therefore designed to bring into clarity the nature of the "imperfect" improvement and politeness that the Mexicans exhibit. As Robertson implies, this has an impact on assessments of character: Montezuma should not be placed into the kind of framework associated with the ancient continents of Europe and Asia. Yet it also affects our view of the characters of the Spanish themselves, and of the nature of their actions. Robertson was determined, by redescribing the nature of the Mexican empire, to reassess the glory of the Spanish *conquistadores*.

This is particularly important when we enter the narrative of Cortes and Montezuma, in which the tendency is to see them in terms of a familiar paradigm, European ardour against Asiatic corruption and effeminacy. In a sense, Montezuma is a more familiar and universal figure still, an embodiment of proud despotism. Robertson makes Montezuma conform to the expectations of the Spanish, thus banishing any suggestion of difference. He was

> ...what might have been expected from a haughty prince in possession of extensive power. The Mexican empire, at this period, was arrived at a pitch of grandeur to which no society ever attained in so short a period...The people were warlike and enterprising; the authority of the monarch unbounded, and his revenues considerable. ...Of all the princes who swayed the Mexican sceptre, he was the most haughty, the

[678] HA, III, p. 195; on De Solis, and Robertson's reaction to him, see the 'Prologo' by José de la

> most violent, and the most impatient of controul. His subjects looked up to him with awe, and his enemies with terror.[679]

Such a brief characterisation serves the purpose of instilling in the reader a vague sense of orientalism, without at all hinting at the 'savagery' at the root of the Mexican polity. It makes also the dramatic point of the vulnerability of Cortes and his followers at the hands of an absolute monarch possessed of great power and wealth. Finally, it creates in the reader a set of expectations concerning Montezuma's future actions that reinforce this point, and which Robertson wastes no time in exploding. Quickly, Robertson is concerned to undermine the initial portrait which he has given of Montezuma, in order to relate his actions more closely to the state of society in which he is caught:

> But though his talents might be suited to the transactions of a state so imperfectly polished as the Mexican empire, and sufficient to conduct them while in their accustomed course, they were altogether inadequate to a conjuncture so extraordinary, and did not qualify him either to judge with that discernment, or to act with the decision, requisite in such an emergency.[680]

Montezuma's subsequent failure to act, almost paralysis, is grounded in the circumscription of his talents to his situation. Montezuma therefore personifies the inability of even a relatively 'polished' American nation to act effectively against the Spanish. It is the purpose

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Revilla to Antonio de Solis, Historia de la Conquista de Méjico (Paris, 1844), pp. 5-9.

[679] HA, II, pp. 252-253.

[680] HA, II, p. 253: in some ways, Robertson's explanation of Montezuma's inaction and consequent imprudence is similar to that of Hume concerning Charles I, although of course in a vastly different context. Hume, Phillipson. For an interpretation of Montezuma's failure to act, see Tzvetan Todorov, Ibid., pp. 71-76.

of Book VII to strip away the facade that the narrative has created, of Montezuma as a mighty monarch whose inexplicable imprudence and infatuation has caused his downfall. The transition that he undergoes, from arrogant pride to "unmanly dejection", while it fits also the effeminacy of the oriental, and conflicts with the fortitude of the savage, hints also at that instability of identity to which the savage is susceptible.[681] However, Robertson complicates this picture, as he does his entire treatment of the Mexicans and Peruvians, by invoking superstition as a factor. The misinterpretation of the Americans as gods links the Mexicans with the earlier islanders, but in the case of the Mexicans their religion is so much more elaborate, and systematic, that its effects are greater and more persuasive. The supreme power of their monarchical system also incapacitates them: their subjection to their monarch being so slavish, his removal leaves them powerless. Thus, the Mexican failure stems also from the circumstances of their partial improvement, which as Robertson reiterates is "imperfect".[682]

Some natives are capable of the action of which Montezuma is incapable: Guatimozin is represented as a worthy opponent of Cortes, possessing also what is Cortes' greatest attribute, "presence of mind", which in Robertson's narrative usually signifies an ideal combination of firmness and flexibility. This is placed in opposition to his people's "levity...moved by every slight impression". He appears in captivity "neither with the sullen fierceness of a barbarian, nor with the dejection of a supplicant", thus placing him in contradistinction to the two alternatives of native behaviour in this second phase of action.[683] There are indications in the narrative of the conquest of Peru that a prince such as Atahualpa,

[681] On Montezuma, see HA, II, esp. pp. 294-318.
[682] HA, III, pp. 183-199.

who has penetration enough to discover the "ruling passion" of the Spanish, love of gold, would be capable of competing with Cortes' less able imitator Pizarro, but the contest is never joined. Pizarro, with the speed of his reversion to violent force, prevents Atahualpa's sagacity ever being put into effect.[684] Similarly, the Peruvians show themselves capable, to an extent unseen in the previous encounters in the New World, of adapting themselves to European forms of action, of observing closely and successfully imitating them:

> During nine months they carried on the siege with incessant ardour, and in various forms; and though they displayed not the same undaunted ferocity as the Mexican warriors, they conducted some of their operations in a manner which discovered greater sagacity, and a genius more susceptible of improvement in the military art. They not only observed the advantages which the Spaniards derived from their discipline and their weapons, but they endeavoured to imitate the former, and turn the latter against them.[685]

They are also observant to improve any circumstance, such as the ambiguous return of Almagro to Peru, to their own advantage. Thus events join both cultures together in a community of observation and calculation: "The Spaniards and Peruvians fixed their eyes upon him with equal solicitude".[686] Here we have the makings of a reciprocal narrative, in which force and discipline are exerted in equal measure, and in which the invention of man can be stretched and forced into action. In the negotiations that ensue, the Inca conducts them "with much address". Yet Robertson swiftly undercuts this promising sign of purposeful

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[683] HA, II, p. 386.
[684] HA, III p. 38, pp. 45-46: eventually, he falls victim to Pizarro's *resentment.*
[685] HA, III, p. 64.

vigour on the part of the Peruvians: these "essays to imitate European arts and to employ European arms" are no more than "imperfect", and the Peruvians are defeated ultimately by their lack of discipline.[687] With the defeat of the Peruvians, the scene of action switches away from them towards the scenes of civil war and dissension that occupy the rest of the narrative. The Peruvians disappear from the narrative, except as instruments of labour and as a form of acquisition, or as silent and spectral spectators of actions in which they cannot participate. This is illustrated vividly if mystifyingly in the defeat of Almagro at Cuzco:

> ...a vast multitude of Indians, assembled to enjoy the spectacle of their {the Spaniards'] mutual carnage, and prepared to attack whatever party remained master of the field...
>
> The Indians, instead of executing the resolution which they had formed, retir'd quietly after the battle was over; and in the history of the New World, there is not a more striking instance of the wonderful ascendant which the Spaniards had acquired over its inhabitants, than that after seeing one of the contending parties ruined and dispersed, and the other weakened and fatigued, they had not courage to fall upon their enemies, when fortune presented them with an opportunity of attacking them with such advantage.[688]

The failure of the Americans to repulse the Spanish thus resolves itself into a question of 'ascendancy', of the manipulation of mental reactions. If the problem of the representation of

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[686] HA, III, p. 66: "The latter, knowing the points in contest between him and his countrymen, flattered themselves that they had more to hope than to dread from his operations".
[687] HA, III, p. 65.
[688] HA, III, pp. 73-74, p. 76.

the Americans in Books II and III lay in their absence as a force, in Books V and VI they are not only present, but possess a mixture of features that identify them both with savage character and, ambiguously, with more advanced forms of action. Their possession of these qualities however is neither straightforward, nor sustained. At the end of each book, what narrative features the natives may have held, or were beginning to acquire, have been erased by their total subjugation.

Book VII adopts a two-stage analysis in its attempt to pin down the true orientation of the Mexicans and Peruvians, their real position on the scale of rudeness to refinement. Firstly, it considers their claims to refinement, and in doing so slips into the same easy and specious analogies that had been condemned in de Solis' narrative. Thus, Robertson categorises the Mexican social and economic organisation under the general heading of feudalism (although, aware that he is stretching his terms a little, he qualifies it with 'almost'). He openly compares Mexico with the magnificence of the Asian monarchies, in opposition to the simplicity of infant states of the Americans. He praises the refinement of their police and opines that in their administration of justice they approach the level of highly civilised societies.[689] However, Robertson then expresses his scepticism of their "superior refinement in arts", and seeks to bring them back into alignment with his general descriptions of the savage character, and to affiliate them once more with "their savage countrymen":

[689] HA, III, pp. 160-174.

> But from other circumstances, one is apt to suspect that their character, and many of their institutions, did not differ greatly from those of the other inhabitants of America.[690]

This is most clearly seen in their "ferocity of character", a trait which locates them back in the heart of Book IV. Ultimately, however, Robertson is forced to concede that both the Mexicans and Peruvians lie outside his synthesis of savage character, and for reasons for which he finds it hard to account. He admits that his interpretation of Mexican character is dependent entirely upon the operation of superstition on their minds, and that it is to this irregular and unaccountable cause that the savage ferocity of their character is to be referred:

> ...from the extravagance of their religious notions, or the barbarity of their rites, no conclusion can be drawn with certainty concerning the degree of their civilisation.

Religion operates indeed to confuse the simple relationship between the progress of a society and its character:

> ...the genius of their religion so far counterbalanced the influence of policy and arts, that notwithstanding their progress in both, their manners, instead of softening, became more fierce.

Despite its indeterminacy in Robertson's sociological scheme, it has a crucial impact in defining both the Mexican and the Peruvian. Robertson focuses upon the singularity of the Mexicans, upon their status outside his mode of explanation and description:

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[690] HA, III, p. 183.

> To what circumstances it was owing that superstition assumed such a dreadful form among the Mexicans , we have not sufficient knowledge to determine. But its effect is visible, and produced an effect that is singular in the history of the human species. [691]

The Mexican, despite his refinement, is far from resembling the European in softness and civility of manners. Indeed, he is located at the furthest extreme of savagery in its most striking form, perhaps even beyond savagery:

> The manners of the people in the New World who had made the greatest progress in the arts of policy, were, in several respects, the most ferocious, and the barbarity of some of their customs exceeded even those of the savage state.[692]

The religion of the Peruvians, by contrast, produces an opposite character, the mildness, meekness and subservience of Las Casas' Islanders, for similarly unaccountable reasons: "there is not an instance in history of any people so little advanced in refinement, so totally destitute of military enterprize".[693] Thus, between them, the Peruvians and the Mexicans represent the two halves of the dichotomy of savage character, and serve to expose its contradictions. The Mexicans and Peruvians lie outside the scope of either the narrative, or Robertson's theoretical machinery, to explain and depict. Yet even in Book VII, Robertson finds himself adhering to terms and modes of social description that are purely European, given the absence of correct ways of describing intermediate forms of social status. The

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[691] HA, III, p. 199.
[692] HA, III, pp. 199-200.
[693] HA, III, p. 226: "there is not an instance in history of any people so little advanced in refinement, so totally destitute of military enterprize".

difficulty of comprehending them within either the narrative form, or the 4-stage theory scheme gives Book VII a rather anomalous appearance: as an appendix to an appendix.

The Character of the Spanish: Cortes, Pizarro and Beyond

In the preface to William Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843), Prescott addressed the dilemma that Robertson had faced in writing the *History of America*: where to conclude the narrative. Prescott decided to develop his story beyond that strictly necessitated by his title:

> ...I have preferred to continue the narrative to the death of Cortes, relying on the interest which the development of his character in his military character may have excited in the reader. I am not insensible to the hazard I incur by such a course. The mind, previously occupied with one great idea, that of the subversion of the capital, may feel the prolongation of the story beyond that point superfluous, if not tedious...To prolong the narrative is to expose the historian to the error so much censured by the French critics in some of their most celebrated dramas, where the author by a premature *dénouement* has impaired the interest of his piece. It is the defect that necessarily attaches, though in a greater degree, to the history of Columbus, in which petty adventures among group of islands make up the sequel of a life that opened with the magnificent discovery of a World... [694]

[694] William Prescott, The History of the Conquest of Mexico (ed. J.F. Kirk, London, 1901), pp. ix-xi.

Robertson's more comprehensive and compressed history of the entire process of discovery and conquest displayed more insistently the constant repetition of the pattern of decline in the narrative: from the unity of a single cohering character, such as Columbus or Cortes, to the variety of minor actions and crimes that proliferated from their pioneering efforts. Although Robertson structured Books V and VI around the figures of Cortes and Pizarro, to a greater extent than in Prescott's mixture of biography and history the heroic progenitor of the process is marginalised and overtaken by the force of events. As Robertson wrote of Cortes:

> His fate was the same with that of all the persons who distinguished themselves in the discovery or conquest of the New World. Envied by his contemporaries, and ill requited by the court which he served, he has been admired and celebrated by succeeding ages.[695]

Told once, this story has in the spectacle of unrewarded and neglected genius its share of pathos and irony. Repeated insistently throughout Robertson's history, and reduced to an ineluctable paradigm, it takes on a new significance. The *History of America* was a history of repetitions: the actions of Columbus and Cortes were repeated on an ascending scale by subsequent explorers, but with diminishing narrative impact. Indeed, the narrative of enterprise is truncated by Robertson in a rather savage manner, and the characters of subsequent explorers and conquerors referred back to their original patterns of Columbus and, especially, Cortes:

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[695] HA, II, p. 413.

> ...were we to follow each leader in his progress, we should discover the same daring courage, the same persevering ardour, the same rapacious desire for wealth, and the same capacity for enduring and surmounting every thing in order to attain it, which distinguished the operations of the Spaniards in their greater American conquests. But, instead of entering into a detail, which, from the similarity of the transactions, would appear almost a repetition of what has been already related...[696]

By redrawing the bounds of what was possible in human action, the discoverers had rendered the rest of the narrative somewhat anti-climactic, if not in many cases redundant:

> ...but as they made no discovery of importance, their adventures are not entitled to any considerable place in the general history of a period, where romantic valour, struggling with incredible hardships, distinguish every effort of the Spanish arms.[697]

The decline however occurs not merely in the intrinsic interest of the events: there is, as we have seen in the case of Columbus, a collapse in both the control and the moral basis of the conquest. In a sense, this is reflected in the characters of the three protagonists of the dramas that Robertson unfolds. Cortes is a more earthy, less transcendent figure than Columbus. He is a military adventurer: he cannot pretend to that disinterested passion for knowledge that Columbus embodies. Nonetheless, he reflects in his person some of the grandeur and heroism of Columbus. Pizarro, although possessed of great abilities, is no more than an imperfect and self-conscious copyist of the grand qualities of Cortes. After Pizarro's assassination, there is no central character remaining in the history, and this is reflected in the civil war that

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[696] HA, III, p. 228.
[697] HA, I, p. 274.

concludes the narrative portion of the history. Only Gasca, the personification of order stripped of those animating qualities that had distinguished Columbus and Cortes, remains as the sole character inhabiting the final stages of the story, a figure who represents the imposition of an external brake upon the events of the New World.

Cortes is visualised by Robertson as the only figure in the narrative with the capacity to emulate the achievements of Columbus. In his combination of boldness and invention, in the "unshaken magnanimity" of his actions, in the firmness and subtlety of his reaction to events, he is represented as a model worthy of imitation:

> His presence of mind never forsook him; his sagacity foresaw every event, and his vigilance provided for it.[698]

Robertson revels in Cortes' imaginative ability to control and master events, and to surmount great obstacles: he is "a genius that delighted in what was bold and splendid".[699] Like Columbus, also, Robertson emphasises the extent to which Cortes broke out of all previous patterns of history, and necessitated indeed a new way of describing the events, which the historian struggles to achieve. Of Cortes' seizure of Montezuma, Robertson declared:

> History contains nothing parallel to this event, either with respect to the temerity of the attempt, or the success of the execution; and were not all the circumstances of this extraordinary transaction authenticated by the most unquestionable evidence, they

[698] HA, II, p. 352.
[699] HA, II, p. 411.

> would appear so wild and extravagant, as to go far beyond the bounds of that probability which must be preserved even in fictitious narrations.[700]

In a manner similar to Columbus, Cortes has by his exceptional actions redrawn the notions of what was considered to be practicable, bringing the apparently rash, chimerical and bold within the control of prudence. What is striking about Cortes, however, is the way in which he emerges from a language of military adventurism, to become the supreme representative of the forces of prudence and sagacity in the New World. Initially he is seen as a turbulent adventurer:

> At this period of his life, he was so impetuous, so overbearing, and so dissipated, that his father was glad to comply with his inclination, and send him abroad as an adventurer in arms.[701]

Yet, in contradiction to the effect of America upon the minds of most Spaniards, Robertson shows the way in which the experience of America, instead of disordering his mind, and infecting him with dangerous and unstable passions, operates to steady his mind and discipline his ambition:

> The turbulence of youth, as soon as he found objects and occupations suited to the ardour of his mind, gradually subsided, and settled into a habit of regular indefatigable activity. The impetuosity of his temper, when he came to act with his equals, insensibly abated, by being kept under restraint, and mellowed into a cordial

[700] HA, II, pp. 306-307.
[701] HA, II, p. 233.

> and soldierly frankness. These qualities were accompanied with calm prudence in concerting his schemes, with persevering vigour in executing them, and with what is peculiar to superior genius, the art of gaining the confidence and governing the minds of men.[702]

Almost uniquely, America acts as a principle of restraint and even of refinement, schooling Cortes in the control of his motives, and the instrumental deployment of his natural qualities. Robertson is not the only historian to see in Cortes the embodiment and application of modern Machiavellian techniques to the New World.[703] Cortes is a character who might have stepped out of the pages of Robertson's European narrative: and Robertson emphasises the choice which Cortes makes, at the beginning of Book V, between the two 'conspicuous theatres' of political and military action, Europe and America.[704] In choosing America, however, Cortes does not divorce himself from the principles of action that were being elaborated in that scene of action, but rather applies them to a new and different environment.

Cortes thus straddles the two worlds of political interest and military adventure. The character of Cortes insulates the conquest of Mexico from shame and infamy. Even when Cortes himself is implicated in the great crimes that stain the Spanish name, he extricates himself from the shame by his boldness. His disgrace, as Robertson revealingly remarked,

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[702] HA, II, p. 235.

[703] On Cortes, Robertson's principal source was the letters that Cortes himself sent to the Emperor. The historians, Bartholomew Diaz, Francisco Lopez de Gomara, and de Solis, were all laudatory and uncritical, and Robertson was wary of them. Diaz however for his undisguised and soldierly frankness was deemed the most useful of the historians. See HA, II, pp. 475-479. Mark Duckworth has pointed out the importance to Robertson of his assessments of the characters of historians in the History of

was "fully effaced by the splendour and merit of the great actions which this had enabled him to perform".[705] Again, Robertson is not alone in defending Cortes from the shame and infamy of the actions of the Spanish in the New World, and Prescott was to do the same. However, Robertson's defence is not only related to Cortes' primitive heroism and valour, but to a language of political manipulation and penetration that sees Cortes as a master of character. When Robertson accuses Cortes of "barbarous cruelty" and the "inconsiderate and wanton display of power" in his treatment of the Mexicans, he then stops and checks himself:

> But, in one view, these proceedings, however repugnant to justice and humanity, may have flowed from that artful policy which regulated every part of Cortes' behaviour.[706]

This was the necessity of cherishing the 'illusion' of the inviolability of the Spanish from attack, and therefore in maintaining his ascendant over the natives. Cortes' entire success in the new World is related to this ability to manipulate the Mexicans, and subdue them through psychological tricks. Early in his incursion into the Mexican empire, he understands the limitations of force, and the supreme importance of gathering information concerning the character of the Mexicans and, especially, of Montezuma. Cortes' genius lies in his recognition that the conquest of the Mexicans required a subtle mixture of the ambassadorial-spectatorial model so necessary in communicating with polished European nations, with the sort of theatrical tricks and open intimidation that Columbus had earlier employed in his

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America: 'An Eighteenth-Century Questionnaire: William Robertson on the Indians', Eighteenth-Century Life, 11 (1987), pp.36-49.

[704] HA, II, pp. 233-234.

[705] HA, II, p. 401.

[706] HA, II, p.310.

dealings with the islanders. It was in knowing how and when to modulate these alternate strategies that Cortes' superiority lay. Cortes' triumph is based on his observations and calculations of the operations and nature of the Mexican mind, and of its likely responses to his own actions. While much of Cortes' success is attributed, crucially, to fortune, Robertson locates Cortes' real genius in his consistent and systematic adherence to his 'artful policy'. If Cortes' real achievement and glory lies in his ability to acquire an ascendant over so many nations, and to knit them together into an alliance against the Mexicans, to acquire the interests of so many semi-savage tribes for his own purposes, he is no less capable of maintaining a domination over his own followers, in a way that contrasts markedly with Columbus. This is because of his proximity to their interest and mental framework. Cortes is animated by the same passions as his followers and there is a greater sense of identity and sympathy between him and the Spaniards: one of his greatest achievements is to achieve between himself and his soldiers a community of feeling and of hope.[707] The conciliation of their base passions is less problematic for Cortes: it is less of an effort for him to stoop to their level. This opens up the possibility of what happens in Peru: of the entire enterprise being sucked into the oblivion of individual passions. Cortes' real weakness, however, is seen to lie in his religious zeal, which is contrasted with, and locked in a continuous combat with, his prudence.[708]

Pizarro's career perfectly illustrates the momentum given to the history of enterprise by the emulation of Cortes, and also the difficulty of replicating the qualities and abilities of such a character, let alone surpassing him. The events of the conquest of Peru are thus structurally

[707] HA, II, pp. 271-272
[708] HA, II, p. 274.

similar, until the narrative is overtaken by civil war. Pizarro is a man of "aspiring mind", "daring temper", "patient" and formed to command. He combines, like Cortes, both boldness and caution, and possesses, also like Cortes, a deep knowledge of the affairs and government of men, the craft, dissimulation, and address of the born politician. His ardour, once again, is placed in opposition to a cold and inactive form of prudence. Pizarro is determined, ardent and inflexible. All of these qualities are by now familiar and even by this late stage in the progress of enterprise, unexceptional. Indeed, what seems to distinguish Pizarro, in some of Robertson's comments, is his caution rather than his daring. However, the passage of events displays Pizarro's character in a much less glorious or defensible light than Cortes. In his perfidy, the rapacity of his seizure of Atahualpa, his haste to employ unmitigated force instead of address, he commits the most criminal and atrocious action to take place in the New World. This Robertson sees as nothing more than a feeble and criminal attempt to repeat the success of Cortes:

> Though Pizarro had seized the Inca, in imitation of Cortes's conduct towards the Mexican monarch, he did not possess talents for carrying on the same artful plan of policy. Destitute of the temper and address required for gaining the confidence of his prisoner, he never reaped all the advantages which might have been derived from being the master of his person and authority.[709]

Pizarro is infected with all of those passions, religious fanaticism, avarice, turbulent ambition, and, as we have seen, resentment, that infect the ordinary Spanish adventurers. That the Pizarros are caught up in the ensuing passions of civil war is of no surprise: they do

[709] HA, III, p. 43.

not exist above and beyond the base desires of their fellow citizens, but partake of them. Pizarro increasingly conforms himself to a narrative far from that of the romance and grandeur of discovery, towards one of rapacity, narrow and partial ambition, and vengeance and resentment, in which Pizarro himself is debased from a transfiguring conqueror into a "party leader". The rise of party factions indeed alters the whole nature of the narrative.

It is necessary to ask why Robertson did not conclude his narrative with the conquest of Peru, since it was the culmination of the great process of enterprise that Columbus had initiated. The narrative of civil war would be as disgusting as tedious, and seemed necessarily to lack instructive value. In part, this is because of the sheer momentum of events: the defeat of the Peruvians is barely completed before the collapse into civil war supervenes.[710] Most of all, however, the civil war narrative was capable of revealing much about the nature of enterprise, and especially the character of the Spanish in contact with the forces of uncontrollable ambition and boundless imagination. Robertson's decision to conclude the narrative with a survey of the "uncommon state of manners" which prevailed in Peru, is to clarify the meaning beneath the chaos of shocking and barbarous events:

> In the minute detail which the contemporary historians have given of the civil dissensions that raged in Peru, with little interruption during ten years, many circumstances occur so striking, and which indicate such an uncommon state of manners, as to merit particular attention.[711]

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[710] The transition takes place over HCV, III, pp. 65-67 with a breathtaking rapidity.
[711] HA, III, p. 138.

Robertson sought therefore to extract from the detritus of the narrative a 'character' of the Spanish in Peru. Although he had signalled throughout the narrative in his *obiter dicta* the chief characteristics of the Spanish in America that he wished specifically to convey to the reader, Robertson felt that these needed to be presented more systematically in a form that mirrored, as it truncated, the character-tableau. The character of the Spanish did not need to be recovered in its entirety: the Spaniard of the sixteenth century, in his broad outlines, was sufficiently close to the modern European in form and manners to be familiar to the reader. It was however those singular aspects of his behaviour, those elements belonging either to the age, or more pertinently to the unique and exceptional circumstances of the discovery and conquest of America, that required specific treatment, and that lay outside the ability of the narrative to paint or explain fully. It was a recognition of the distance between reader and adventurer that forced Robertson to have recourse to extra-narrative devices in order to encompass the actions of the *conquistadores*. In addition, it reflected Robertson's realisation that his 'framing device' for the character of the Spanish, the history of enterprise traced in Book I, did not fully encompass the actions and motives of the generality of the adventurers who followed Columbus, Balboa, and Cortes, the paragons of the process. Thus, it is useful to see Robertson's digressive conclusion on the manners of the Spanish in America as another retrospective act of clarification, prompted by confusions in the narrative and imprecisions in the language of character used to describe the Spanish throughout the narrative.

This 'character' of the Spanish in America identifies their primary traits as supreme individualism, ferocity, lack of faith, and an inconsiderate lack of regard for the future.

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[711] HA, III, p. 138.

Robertson notes, in language similar to that used concerning the Americans, their independence:

> Every adventurer in Peru considered himself as a conqueror, entitled, by his services, to an establishment in that country which had been acquired by his valour. In the contests between the rival chiefs, each chose his side as he was directed by his judgement or affections.[712]

In addition, the Spanish displayed a destructive rancour in their wars against their own countrymen to be matched only by the savages against whom they also display the full extent of their barbarity:

> Together with their courage, they retained all the ferocity by which they were originally distinguished. Civil discord never raged with a more fell spirit than among the Spaniards in Peru. To all the passions which usually envenom contests among countrymen, avarice was added, and rendered their enmity more rancorous.[713]

This additional passion is one from which the Americans are free, but since this diversification of motives merely fuels the violence of war, it would seem that the Americans are less capable of ferocity than the unfettered European. The European placed outside the policing bounds of authority, quickly collapses into a form of barbarity not formally distinct from the characteristics of savagery, externally considered.[714] On a number of occasions in

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[712] HA, III, p. 139: note the use of the tribal term 'chiefs'.
[713] HA, III, p. 141.
[714] This was a point made by Diderot and Raynal: "Passé l'Equatour l'homme n'est ni Anglais, ni Hollandais, ni Francais, ni Espagnol, ni Portugais. Il ne conserve de sa patrie que les principes et les

the narrative the untamed Spanish are equated with savages: thus, the massacre of the Cholulans is effected by the "destructive rage of the Spaniards, or the implacable revenge of their Indian allies".[715] The equivalence and interchangeability of Spaniard and Indian, and Robertson's effacement of their distinctions in this particular action, has disturbing implications. Similarly, the way in which the mentality of the Spaniards is transformed by fancy and imagination seems to bring them closer to the American world of superstition and metaphor:

> That a tale so fabulous should gain credit among simple, uninstructed Indians is not surprising. That it should make any oppression upon an enlightened people, appears, in the present age, altogether incredible...The Spaniards, at that period, were engaged in a career of activity which gave a romantic turn to their imagination, and daily presented to them strange and marvellous objects. A new world was opened to their view. They visited islands and continent, of whose existence mankind in former ages had no conception...nature seemed to assume another form...They seemed to be transported into enchanted ground; and after the wonders which they had seen, nothing, in the warmth and novelty of their admiration, appeared so extraordinary as to be beyond belief.[716]

The Spaniards are also accused of levity, fickleness, and emotional instability, rapid and uncontrolled transitions of mood. All of their qualities border upon those of the native

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préjugés qui autorisent ou excusent sa conduite...Tels se sont montrés tous les Europeens, tout distinctement, dans les contrées du Nouveau Monde". As Pagden has pointed out, this new type of savage is not a savage at all, because he lacks the typical savage virtues: Anthony Pagden, Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France (Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 165-168.

[715] HA, II, p. 291.

Americans, and this identification is strengthened by Robertson's association of the Spanish in Peru with the dissolution of civil society. Each individual is isolated in his own world of private fantasy, "at liberty to decide for himself, without any guide but his own interests & passions". He is free to gratify his desires without control. The Spaniard thus represents the regression of civil man in a new environment far from the "restraints of law and order". This instability in the descriptions of character serves to reveal how far the mechanism used to describe the savage American is confused with more general and less sociological moralistic categories, into which the Spanish are readily inserted. Like the American, each Spaniard is reduced to a generic pattern, is made to possess the same desires: "all intent on the same object and under the dominion of the same passion".[717]

However, the differences between the Spaniard and the American are of course manifold, and further underline the inadequacy of conventional character attributes. The instability of the Spaniard is propulsive, and enables him to break out of accustomed patterns of behaviour. His capacity for fantasy, the constant enlargement of his expectations in the unbridled conditions of the New World, animate him into further action and mutations of character:

> Such a rapid change of fortune produced its natural effects. It gave birth to new wants, and new desires. Veterans, long accustomed to hardship and toil, acquired of a

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[716] HA, I, p. 282.
[717] HA, III, pp. 98-99: while the Spanish are disconnected individuals, like the Americans they are insufficiently individuated, with only one object. Likewise, Robertson describes them as "rude conquerors".

> sudden a taste for profuse and inconsiderate dissipation, and indulged in all the excesses of military licentiousness.[718]

The irony of this application of the theoretical language of evolving needs and desires, which of course lies at the base of the process of enterprise, to explain corruption, license and anarchy, is almost certainly unconscious, but it is present nonetheless. The imaginative impact of the New World upon the minds of the Spanish, which David Womersley has shown stretches the constraints of probabilistic narrative, in fact settles into a familiar pre-modern pattern, the narrative of resentment and revenge, made more turbulent and chaotic by the addition of avarice and a larger and more destabilising ambition than was ever possible in feudal Europe.[719] Indeed, the *History of America* witnesses the democratisation of ambition: "Every adventurer considered himself as a conqueror".[720] With this democratisation comes a lack of control and order.

It is not only the Spanish who are implicated in this instability of character: Robertson was no idle purveyor of the *leyenda negra*, as his treatment of Las Casas reveals.[721] As Robertson wrote of the relationship between the English and the American in his incomplete history of British America:

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[718] HA, III, p. 140.
[719] HA, III, p. 142: "Civil discord never raged with a more fell spirit than among the Spaniards in Peru. To all the passions which usually envenom contests among countrymen, avarice was added, and rendered their enmity more rancorous".
[720] HA, III, p. 139.
[721] Robertson's desire to relate the Spanish to a common mentality of discovery places him outside the narrow characterology of the anti-Spanish Black legend. See Ricardo Garcia Carcel, La leyenda negra: Historia y opinión (Madrid, 1992), pp. 130-134. Robertson's characterisation of Las Casas was controversial, and was execrated by Horace Walpole. Undoubtedly it owed much to Robertson's espousal of the Spanish Imperialist historians such as Herrera. Nonetheless, Robertson was determined

> ...the behaviour of the two peoples seemed now to be completely reversed. The Indians, like men acquainted with the principles of integrity and good faith, on which the intercourse between nations is founded, confided in the reconciliation, and lived in absolute security without suspicion of danger; while the English, with perfidious craft, were preparing to imitate savages in their revenge and cruelty.[722]

The transition of the colonies from enterprise to order requires a shift in character, from "licentious adventurers" to men "less enterprising, less desperate, and more accustomed to move in the path of sober and peaceable industry".[723] It is not Robertson's purpose to depict this slow and gradual change, although he portrays it as a gradual loss of momentum by the emulative forces of enterprise. It is accompanied by a slow encroachment by the forces of authority, personified by the figure of Gasca, who finally detaches enterprise from prudence.[724] Enterprise to an extent is regarded as a temporary phenomenon, a virulent fever which burns itself out and leaves its host purged. This is a long process of which Robertson eschews the narrative depiction. The actions of later colonial history are "excited rather by the ambition and turbulence of particular men, than by general or public motives". Therefore, "the detail of them is not the object of this history". This seems to be an arbitrary closure to the narrative, but it is due to the steady retreat of the process of enterprise from meaning and purpose.

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to see Las Casas as an embodiment of misplaced zeal in opposition to the prudence of the Spanish government. See HA, I, p. 317.

[722] William Robertson, The History of America: Books IX and X (London, 1796), p.64.

[723] HA, III, p. 149.

[724] Brading has correctly identified Robertson as a partisan of the Spanish crown against the colonists, although he rather harshly sees the History of America as little more than a paraphrase of Herrera: Brading, Ibid., pp. 432-441.

Conclusion

Unlike the *History of Charles V*, no consistent and enduring pattern of events emerges in the *History of America*. Raynal and Burke had advanced two contrasting theories concerning the impact of the discovery of America upon the nature of history. Raynal had claimed that modern history, with its stifling balance of power, exhibited only the "wretched tranquillity of servitude" within each nation, in which the two great animating factors of history, the fanaticism of religion and the spirit of conquest, no longer operated: "Our history is now insipid and trifling", and would in future only be written by 'commercial philosophers'. The discovery of America had happened at the right time to set the machinery of enterprise in motion: its discovery in the eighteenth century "would only furnish employment for our curiosity", so distanced from the springs of romantic and arduous action had we become.[725] Thus, the history of America was a relic of an earlier age of historical events. Burke argued that the history of Europe preceding that of America was "nothing but one series of treasons, usurpations, murders and massacres: nothing of a manly courage, nothing of a solid and rational policy". The true era of actions began with the history of America, and the commercial revolution which followed in its train: its principal effect had been to "rouse that spirit of generous enterprise, that can alone make any nation powerful or glorious".[726]

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[725] Raynal, II, pp. 121-122.
[726] Burke, I, pp. 27-28, p. 15

Robertson takes no definite line, but the movement of the history of America away from narrative suggests that Spanish America at least was not a site of great or prominent events. Robertson does not trace the long transition from disruptive and chaotic action to sober industry: he leaves a vast unwritten gulf between Books VI and VIII. The feeble and stagnant state of the Spanish colonies in the eighteenth century moreover removes them far from either the field of purposive action or the regular and beneficial operations of well-regulated commercial systems. The strange isolation of the Spanish New World from intercourse with the world prevents it from participating fully in either form of interaction: its development is therefore *sui generis*, an object lesson in how not to conduct imperial policy.[727] The intimate connection between this languid and corrupt body, and the great actions of Columbus, is by no means apparent. Yet as we have seen, in Chapter 5, Robertson generally agreed with Burke's analysis: the discovery of America was another sign of that flourishing of modernity in the sixteenth century which made narrative possible: the nature of events had altered, and thus, against Raynal, it was the modern age which furnished material for great and sustained narratives. The commercial philosopher had not completely taken possession of Clio.

[727] Robertson was greatly influenced by the works of Campomanes, with whom he was in mutually beneficial correspondence. See for example NLS MS 3943, ff. 210-215: Campomanes to Robertson, 27th June 1787.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to reassert the thematic complexity and theoretical value of Robertson's narratives of events. Beneath the looming formal structure of Robertson's prose, which according to one critic exhibited the "unimpassioned severity of an inscription on the grave", Robertson used his narratives as vehicles for an acute and thoughtful examination of the nature of narrative history itself.[728] By placing narrative in a theoretical framework, he was able to transform the conventions of narrative, and its abstract language, into inquiries into the relationship between the state of society and the nature of events. The crucial instrument in this process was the language of character and motivation: by positioning the characters of his narratives in the midst of emulative processes which served to define the objects and nature of their motives, Robertson provided a conjectural-historical account of the successive alteration of political motivation under the pressure of evolving social forms. His theoretical accounts were designed to clarify and indeed lend meaning to his narratives: yet his exercises in theoretical history were in fact given a greater impact and dynamism through the narrative exemplification of the principles which they merely described. Thus, Robertson's narratives are essential to the understanding of the political applications of theoretical history.

Nonetheless, there were limitations to Robertson's attempt to provide a clear social-theoretical basis for the narrative exposition of character. As we have seen, Robertson did not entirely avoid the scepticism to which all forms of Tacitean history, with their claims to

[728] Blackwood's Magazine 52 (1842), p. 421.

penetrate to the "secret springs of action", were subject. Most seriously, the confrontation of Robertson's dynamic theoretical narrative of character with the immovable *tableau* of the American threatened to overturn the careful distinctions that Robertson had sought to make in character descriptions, and obscure the nuances of meaning of which they were capable. The gulf in character between Spaniards and Americans almost prevents them from sharing the same space in the history: unable to contextualise the motives of such disparate characters all at once, Robertson retreats from narrative into a series of parallel dissertations, never to return. It is perhaps the case that Robertson felt unable to repeat the sort of narrative that Charles V had given him, for while the establishment of a distinct and enduring pattern of events had been the central message of *Charles V*, Robertson's interest lay in the process by which his characters had adapted to new and rapidly changing conditions of action. With the settlement of European affairs into a regular system, there was no longer a period of transition to describe. An interactive narrative of the modern European states system, while exhibiting in full the mutuality of character scrutiny that Robertson had dramatised so effectively in *Charles V*, would lack the crucial theoretical element, the process of *becoming*, that distinguished his history. Without the *View*, such a history would resemble Robert Watson's lifeless *History of Philip II*, a narrative stripped of the intricacies of Robertson's work.[729] The *Historical Disquisition*, by contrast, possibly because of Robertson's own age and exhaustion, is a work denuded of narrative: instead, an 'introductory' description of the process of commercial expansion, similar to Book I of *America*, faces uncomfortably a

[729] Robert Watson, The History of the Reign of Philip the Second, King of Spain [1777-1783](London, 1812).

detached *tableau* of the 'Hindoo' people. The *Disquisition*, because it is not allied to a narrative framework, has a hastily improvised air.[730]

It can be seen that in Robertson's narratives he used two schemes of character analysis. The first, that of Charles V and Columbus, may be called 'elaborative': it located character in a progressive and unfolding context, and it used the narrative to develop in full, that is *in the course of action*, the implications of the theoretical discourse. In the *History of America*, however, Robertson was increasingly obliged to adopt a 'clarificatory' form of character analysis, used not to establish the narrative framework, but to usurp its function of displaying and explaining character. As we have seen, the clarificatory mode of characterisation arose from certain problems inherent in the language of character in the narrative. However, neither Book IV nor Book VII succeeded in circumventing the problem: only by immersing oneself in the culture and manners of a society could the terms used for character analysis have any practical or specific meaning. Nonetheless, although the *History of America* reveals much about the pressures placed upon conventional narrative forms by the attempt to bring two distinct stages of society into a common narrative framework, it would be incorrect to see Robertson's later career as a retreat from narrative, and part of a growing tendency towards abstract characterology: the exceptionality of the events of *America* was an insistent enough theme of Robertson's for us to believe that for him the *History of Charles V* still remained the pattern of mature, modern history. For it was Robertson who had asserted most elaborately the narrative of modern actions, and the analysis of political character, as an

[730] Nicholas Phillipson has expressed bafflement at the structure of the Disquisition: see 'William Robertson as Historian', Works, I, pp. lvii-lix. Nonetheless, C.-F. Volney saw it as a perfect specimen of philosophical history: see La loi naturelle/ Leçons d'histoire (ed. Jean Gaulmier; Paris, 1980), pp. 128-130.

intrinsically theoretical exercise, and a necessary part of the history of the human mind. In this, he had made the study of character one of multi-dimensional interaction, rather than the sterile dissection of isolated types.

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